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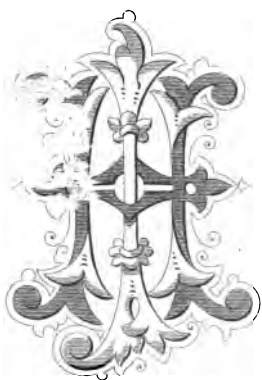
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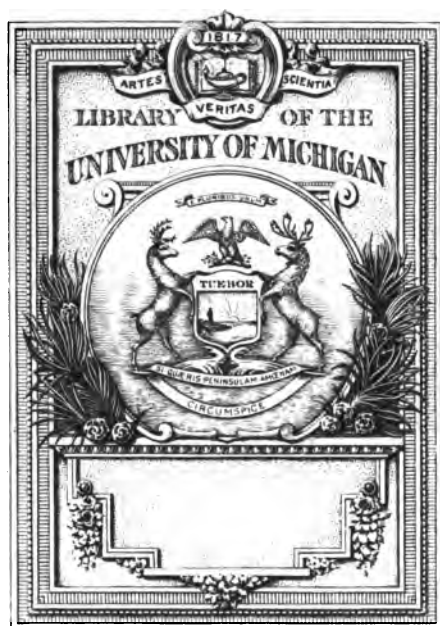
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*Julia Hazlehurst,
Halton Grange.*

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A SUMMER JAUNT

Stannard, Mrs. Henrietta Eliza Vaughan Palmer,

A SUMMER JAUNT

BEING

A RAMBLING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

JOHN STRANGE WINTER *pseud.*

AUTHOR OF

"Bootles' Baby," "A Soldier's Children," "The Truth-Tellers," "My Geoff,"
"A Sea-Side Flirt," "Everybody's Favourite," "The Price of a
Wife," "Heart and Sword," "Two Husbands,"
"The Sentimental Maria," Etc., Etc.



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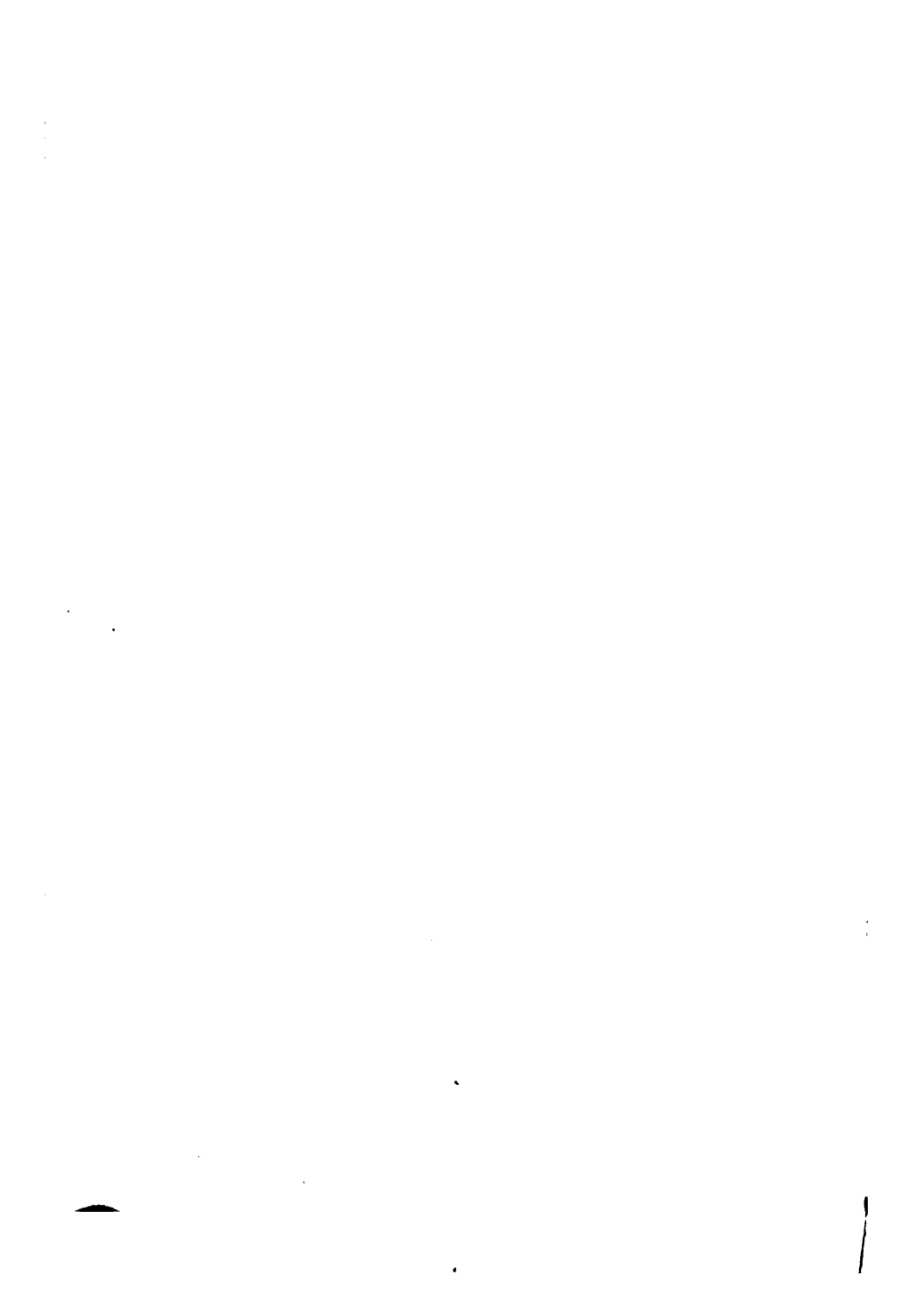
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A SUMMER JAUNT.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR OF US.

I WAS hard at work in my study one day when Nell came in. She looked at me with a dismayed face when she saw that I had laid down my pen.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "I thought that you were only smoking. I will come again another time."

She is very considerate, is Nell, much more so than most wives would be.

"It's all right, little woman," I cried; "I had really finished. What is it?"

"Had you really finished?"

"Yes; honour bright. I had just got to the end of my chapter."

She came back, and shut the door with a certain

solemnity which told me that she wanted something.

"I wanted to ask you, dear," she said sweetly, "whether you have made up your mind about our going away this year?"

With something of a start I came back from the thought of a particularly smart hussar, who had been having a good time in Scotland among the grouse and girls.

"Yes! About going away, Nell? No, I hadn't thought about it. What are your ideas on the subject?"

"My ideas?" said Nell, with a sigh. "Well, you see, it's so different, Jack, since we had a baby."

"You wanted a baby," I remarked.

"Oh, yes, dear," looking at me reproachfully; "of course I wanted a baby. Why, you weren't thinking that I was grudging Baby having come. Oh, no, Jack; why, she's the very light of my life! She's perfection—she's a darling! Oh, no, dear; but it does make a difference, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose it does, and will, make a difference."

"Well, when it is just a man and woman going away by themselves—why, that is one thing; but

when it comes to taking a dear darling baby and a Nanna away, too, it is quite another thing."

"I don't quite see," I remarked—I said it diffidently, because if there is one thing that my Nell is rather touchy about, it is the matter of that baby—that much longed-for and ardently-desired child of our affections—whom we called by eight names because we were afraid we should never have another, and asked all our dearest friends to be godfathers and godmothers to—"I don't quite see why we need take Baby at all. When we had Phyl and the twins with us, we left the twins at Wix very happily with Nanna, and we came back and found them in radiant health. She is really far more Nanna's baby than ours, you know, Nell," I added.

My wife looked at me with a reproach in her lovely eyes which seemed to smite me like a knife, or an east wind, or anything equally cutting and unpleasant.

"Well, Jack," she said, "I confess that you have taken my breath away."

"Why?" I asked, wilfully failing to take her meaning.

"Do you wish me seriously to understand, Jack,

that you would be content, willing, happy to leave *Baby* behind, *even* with Nanna?"

"I don't think that *Baby* would suffer," I replied.

"Suffer—what, with Nanna? Oh, no; but could you live without her for three months?"

"Are we going away for three months?" I asked.

"That is not an answer to my question. Could you live without *Baby* for three months?"

"Well, I might—if I had you," I replied. "I shouldn't like it, of course; but if it were for *Baby's* good, I would try."

I thought that that was really a stroke of diplomacy worthy of a better brain than that possessed by your humble servant. It had no effect upon Nell whatever.

"I don't believe," she said triumphantly, "that you could live for three weeks without *Baby*! Think what it would be like in the morning without *Baby* coming to pay us a little visit and tell us what kind of morning it is."

"But it is Nanna who tells us what kind of a morning it is."

"Oh, well, it is the same thing."

"I can live very well without Nanna," I replied.

"I have a very deep and strong feeling of affection

and respect for the old lady—you know that, Nell, perfectly well—but not such an affection that I cannot take a holiday with my wife without her. I don't know what you may have thought," I went on, meanly pressing home my advantage, "but my affection for Nanna is not that sort of affection."

"Don't be so silly, Jack," said Nell, with an adorable smile; "when the fit takes you, you do say such silly things! The question has nothing to do with Nanna; the question is—Where shall we go for a holiday?"

"With the baby?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir, with the baby. If you, a hard-hearted father, can live without your child, I cannot."

I admit it frankly, I may be wrong—I really forget how many years Nell and I have been married, a good many—but at this point I caught her in my arms and kissed her.

"Dearest," I said, "you shall not do without your baby. You shall take your baby with you, if it costs us the last penny we have in the world."

"I didn't know we were hard up, Jack," said Nell, with a sudden look of concern.

I laughed outright.

"Thank Heaven, we are not," I cried. "We can well afford our usual trip; and as to going without Baby—well, I don't believe it would be, could be a success."

I had a vision of what Nell would be like if I ever parted her from that baby. It was purely pictorial, thought I. I came back to reality and Nell when I saw her eyes, full of beauty and reproach, fixed upon my countenance.

"Well, now, dearest," I said, "what have you thought of?"

"I was waiting for you, Jack," she said softly.

"Oh! Well, suppose we go to Homburg again?"

"Dear old boy," she said, "don't you think, as Baby is just beginning to say little words, it would be rather rough to take her to anywhere in Germany?"

"Why?"

"Because she might get her ideas of language mixed; German is such a very hard language to learn."

My poor Nell had been struggling valiantly with German ever since we first went to Homburg, nay, before Homburg ever saw the light of our countenances, when we had been at other German Spas

that we loved not as dearly as the little *Bad* in the Taunus Mountains. I did not think, myself, that it would hurt the little Doris in the least, either to take her to Homburg or to run the risk of upsetting her baby brain with an admixture of the German tongue. However, so long as I was with my own, it mattered little or nothing to me where I took my holiday, so I fell in at once with Nell's wishes.

"Of course that bars Germany," I said decidedly, "and, of course we have, without doubt, been very faithful to the Fatherland; supposing we go to Brighton?"

"Brighton? In July, Jack? No, dear, *not* Brighton."

"Then Brighton is knocked on the head," was my next observation.

"I would rather not go to any English watering-place," said Nell. "You see, Jack dear, Baby has all her troubles before her—"

"Like a young bear," I put in.

"Nothing can make Baby like a young bear, Jack; but Baby *has* all her troubles before her. She is teething now, poor darling, and she has only just got over her vaccination, and somehow, to me, English children seem always to be in a state of

measles, or whooping-cough, or something horrid of that kind ; I really should be afraid to take her to any English seaside place. You see, Jack dear, English mothers always want to take their convalescent children to the seaside—one never knows where one may pick up something someone else has left behind, and Baby would be so liable to catch things."

"That is very true," I said. "I suppose Belgian, French, and German children do have things of that kind, but one never hears of it. Well, then, that knocks England on the head."

"Yes, I think we will decide on going somewhere out of England, Jack."

"Then what about France?"

"I should like to go to France. I don't know much about France, Jack ; you have always loved Germany so much."

"And you," I reminded her.

For I had not forgotten, though perhaps Nell had done so, divers golden summer evenings, when the sun was sinking to rest with a dull red glow, making a haze over the mountains, trees, fields, and streams, and Nell had stood, drinking in the beautiful, fair, still scene, and had absolutely rhapsodised. She has a very tender conscience,

has my Nell, and she blushed a little as she remembered it.

"Yes, dear, I know what you're thinking of," she said, with a charming shyness about her, wonderful in a woman who had been married so many years, "but that, of course, was for us—for you and me—not for Baby. You see, when one has a baby so fragile, so susceptible, so apt to take everything that she is thrown in the way of, one has to be so much more careful. I feel, you know, Jack, somehow as if since Baby came, our lives have been entirely altered."

"They have," I put in.

"Yes, dear, I don't quite mean that, but as if our outlook upon life is different."

"It is," I agreed.

And then Nanna came in with that baby, that baby with her eight names and her cloud of witnessesses—I mean godfathers and godmothers; the baby that Nell had a moment before spoken of as being so fragile, so susceptible, so apt to take everything objectionable that came in her way. I looked at my wife, I looked at my baby, and I wondered how a woman with a keen sense of humour, such as she used to have, a woman with all her senses about her, with her eyes fully

developed, could speak of such a baby in such terms. For there was that child, just fourteen months old, the very picture of a fine, strong, well-developed, healthy English child, come of decent parentage, with nothing abnormal about it, nothing over-precocious, and yet a vast credit to everybody concerned. By a dexterous movement she wriggled down from Nanna's protecting arm and set off across the floor towards me. Her gait was staggering, it is true, and she balanced with her little hands as she came along on her firm and sturdy legs, like little pillars of iron or marble, or anything solid and unyielding that you like.

"Dad, dad, dad," she said, as she gained my side. And then, as I lifted her on to my knee, she turned her face, and put her head down with a caressing bump against my cheek. I know a good deal about babies, I have known nice babies and nasty babies, dry babies and slobbery babies, strong ones and weak ones, but I have never known any little child who had, while still so young, such definite, decided ways of her very own as that baby of ours has. This is her own little definite way of kissing one, just dabbing a fluffy golden head against one's cheek. Sometimes she will give you her forehead in the same way,

but it is generally the side of the soft golden head.

"It shall be somewhere in France," I said, looking across the child's head at Nell.

She smiled at me, and I think that she knew, too, that I would not like to take my holiday leaving the child behind.

CHAPTER II.

FOR AND AGAINST.

HAVING definitely decided on taking our summer holiday in some part of *la belle France*, our next move was to decide the actual locality. Usually at this time of year we had been in the habit of investing largely in postage stamps for the procuration of programmes of certain firms which arrange summer travel for enterprising travellers. But this year we, for the first time, did not indulge ourselves in any fancy pictures of what our holiday was to be. It was no use getting lists and estimates of travel when we knew perfectly well we could not possibly indulge in them. For years it had been a favourite "journey in Spain" with us to plan out a voyage down the Danube. How many rhapsodies have I heard from Nell on that subject.

"Jack, dear, think how perfect it would be to find ourselves floating down the blue Danube, through the Iron Gates, and right down to Belgrade?"

Every year we had intended to do the Danube the following year; but, with the advent of baby, the most romantic river in Europe had for us passed over among the impossibilities. We should certainly have to wait now until Baby was old enough to appreciate such a trip.

"When are we going to do the Danube, Nell?" I asked her teasingly one day, when she was full on the subject of our projected holiday.

"The Danube, Jack? Oh, yes, we did think of going down the Danube, didn't we? Well, I am glad now that we never went."

"Are you. Why?"

"Because it is hardly a trip one would take twice, and Baby will enjoy it so much when she is older."

There is an inconsequence about Nell which is delicious. How feminine and how charming she is! I am sure if those independent new women with their hard felt hats and their uncompromising garments, their terrible independence and their general lack of softness, could know how com-

pletely their opposites possess the masculine land, they would cease their troubling at once and for ever. Nell, of course, would never, under any circumstances, have shone as a new woman; she would never have made a politician, or a good lawyer, or an architect of anything but her husband's happiness; her own *entourage* is more to her than the fate of nations, and Baby's little finger than the flow of the grandest river in Europe; so far as she was concerned, it is evident that until Baby is old enough to make the journey, and to appreciate the trip, the blue Danube might flow backwards, or it might cease flowing altogether. Therefore, instead of the postage stamps for the programmes of the tourist offices, I expended several shillings in a Baedeker's "Northern France." Nell was delighted when I walked in with the little red book in my hand

"I really think, Jack," she said—"and I have been thinking a good deal about it since we decided on going to some part of France—I really think, dear, we could not do better than go to Boulogne. You see, it is a very short sea journey for one thing—only an hour and a half, or something like that—and it would be less dull for you than most other places."

"Are we going to stop in one place all the time?" I asked.

She looked at me doubtfully.

"Oh, well, I think that that would be our best plan, wouldn't it? Because, you see, if Nanna and Baby were quite settled somewhere, we could go away for a couple of days at a time easily. That would not be like leaving Baby behind in England."

"No, that is true. You think that Boulogne would do, then?"

"Well, I think there's a great deal to be said in favour of Boulogne. You see, it is a big place, Jack, forty-six thousand inhabitants," she added, running her finger down the page—page seven, to be precise—of Baedeker's "Northern France," where a description of Boulogne is to be found—"forty-six thousand inhabitants, numerous schools—"

"My dear, we don't want a school at present."

"No, Jack, of course not; but there are schools, and I was telling you about them. The town is divided into the Haute Ville and the Basse Ville, and there are a thousand English residents. I am sure it must be a most interesting place, dear. There is a new harbour and a pier, and a—"

"And a Casino," I put in. "You mustn't forget the Casino because that is a most important item."

"Then there is," she went on, not noticing my interruption, "then there is the Etablissement des Bains, with a garden and a handsome Casino. The foot of the cliff beyond the Casino is skirted by the Boulevard Ste. Beuve, named in honour of the eminent critic, who was born at Boulogne. Now, I always thought," said Nell, "that Ste. Beuve was a feminine person. How could I have made such a mistake as that?"

Somehow Nell can always give chapter and verse for most of her assertions and beliefs. She stretched out a hand to a smart little revolving book-case in which she keeps her own pet little library.

"Ah, Ste. Beuve—I thought I had seen something about Ste. Beuve," said she, turning over the leaves of the little book with her dainty hands. "'Ste. Beuve, Virgin, Princess of the royal blood, born in 600; founded a monastery of which she was the Abbess'—I suppose it means Nunnery," she interpolated, "but the French say Monastère—'of which she was the Abbess, and died in 674.' Now I should have thought," she added, "that

the Boulevard had been called after this illustrious lady. It only shows how ignorant I am ! ”

I thought that it showed that my wife was more sympathetic to the Saints than to the critics ; however, that is neither here nor there.

“ There is an esplanade, ramparts, a museum, a fish market, a cemetery, a chateau—all sorts of things. Well, really, Jack, I think Boulogne would do beautifully for us, particularly if we get somewhere close to the Casino Gardens, because they would be so nice for Nanna to take Baby to.”

I did not think that the chateau, or the museum, or the fish market, or the esplanade, or the ramparts, or any of the attractions which Nell had mentioned, would make very much difference to the pleasures of my holiday ; but I am a person of contented disposition, and, given a change of scene, with a Casino or its German equivalent, combined with good air and decent cooking, I can make myself happy anywhere, fortunately for me.

So we quite made up our minds that we would go to Boulogne, and it being that time of year when the question asked by most people was, “ Well, where are you going for a holiday ? ” we received a great deal of advice, and heard a great

many opinions expressed on the subject of our intended destination. I am bound to say that, taken as a whole, they were bad ; making an average of it, the verdict was dead against Boulogne. One great friend of Nell's—another Nell—told her that Boulogne was a very charming place, and that you could get gambling there nearer to England than in any other town ; she also told us that she had put up at an excellent hotel there—quite cheap, only sixteen francs a day—from which a tram ran to the door of the Casino. She added, as a sort of extra inducement to us to start with a good opinion of the French Margate, that it would be the very place for Baby.

“For,” she said, “when I was there last, the Arthur de la Rues were also there with their little child of seven or eight months old. Of course, really, between ourselves, dear, I think it is a mistake to take a baby to a hotel. That baby was a very tiresome little thing ; it cried all the time, and poor Mrs. Arthur de la Rue was always in a fever about it.”

“Was it a boy or a girl ?” asked Nell.

“Upon my word, I don't know,” said our friend. “I think it was a girl. Surely it was called Yolande ; yes, its name was Yolande. But it was

a tiresome little thing. Whenever I was in my bedroom, it was always roaring ; it was just over my head."

"Oh, you think, perhaps, that the child was not as well there ?" said Nell, her face falling.

"Oh, I don't know. It always seemed right enough when one saw it. It was cross or something."

The very next person to whom we mentioned Boulogne as our probable destination for the holidays said sharply :

"Of course, you are not going to take the baby ?"

"Oh, yes ; we should not dream of leaving Baby behind," said Nell, with dignity.

"Oh, you are going to take the baby ! I lost my little girl at Boulogne."

"Did you really ?" Nell exclaimed blankly.

"Yes, I did. There was nothing whatever the matter with her when we left home—she was a strong, healthy, handsome child—but Boulogne was too much for her. I—I—excuse me, Mrs. Winter, I can't talk about it."

I knew from the look on Nell's face that the fate of Boulogne was settled.

The next time anybody asked us where we were

going—an hour or so after our conversation with the lady who had lost her baby at Boulogne—someone told us that you could get better roasted potatoes there than anywhere else in Europe.

"It is great fun," this lady said. "You buy them in the street, and eat them as you go along. They are like balls of flour."

Somehow it seemed to Nell that our holiday was not dependent upon the excellency of roasted potatoes.

"I don't know, Jack," she said to me afterwards, "that Boulogne would do for us. I shouldn't like to take Baby where there is any risk."

"My dear child," I said, "there is a risk wherever you take a baby."

"Oh, yes, of course I understand that; but more than necessary risk, I mean. People seem to say that Boulogne is so smelly and unwholesome. Whatever attractions Boulogne may have, it is evidently not the place for a baby."

"Then," said I, reaching out my hand for the Baedeker's "Northern France," "we must consider which is the next best place."

I opened the map at the beginning of the book.

"Boulogne, Calais, Cap Gris-Nez, Gravelines,

Dunkerque. Somehow they don't sound inviting, do they ? ”

“They don't,” said Nell, looking over my shoulder ; “but go further down the map. What is there below Boulogne ? ”

“Neufchatel, Etaples, St. Valery, Cayeu, le Treport, Dieppe. What,” I asked, “do you say to Dieppe ? ”

CHAPTER III.

A PRELIMINARY CANTER.

"I BELIEVE," said Nell, in answer to my question, "that Dieppe is rather a nice sort of place. I know two or three people who have been there, and they simply loved it. Turn to Dieppe, Jack, and see what the book says."

"Dieppe," I said, turning to the description of Dieppe, "is quite a small place—twenty-two thousand inhabitants. A fashionable watering-place; considerable coal trade with England, and timber trade with Norway and Sweden—all quite clean things, Nell."

"Clean?" said she inquiringly.

"Oh, yes, quite clean," I responded. "In the sense of clean and wholesome."

"Ah, yes, I see," said Nell.

"There seems to be a very nice Casino, a very

handsome Plage, a castle, soldiers, and a couple of wonderful old churches," I went on. "There are plenty of apartments in the Rue Aguado, and some good pictures in the Hotel de Ville."

"My darling boy," said Nell, looking at me with scorn-filled eyes, "what do the pictures in the Hotel de Ville matter to us, or how old the churches are, or anything but whether it is healthy for Baby?"

"And amusing for ourselves," I put in.

"Yes, yes, of course; but all the same Baby is the first consideration. Does it say anywhere that it is healthy?"

"Well, dear, it says it is a fashionable watering-place."

"Could we make excursions from Dieppe?"

"Any amount of them. You can go to Arques, where there is a castle, and where you can have tea and such-like; then you can go to Pourville, which is a pretty little bathing place at the mouth of the Scie; Varangeville is but a little further on; and a little further on still is a wonderful lighthouse, and from that we can go on still a little further to St. Marguerite and Quiberville, which, being the furthest of all away, is only eight and a half miles from Dieppe. That means at least four different

excursions, if we choose to make four different excursions of it. Then, on the other side of the town, on the coast, is Puy—that is where Lord Salisbury for years had a villa; and Berneval is another place about six miles off, which is only a decent drive. Then there is Rouen. We could run up to Rouen for the day, or stay a single night. Paris is only about three and a half hours, and there are many other places where we could go for pleasure to you and copy for me. Le Havre is interesting, and, if I remember rightly, someone told me that there is a boat service to Mont. St. Michel and all that part. In fact, we could settle ourselves very comfortably at Dieppe, and make it the headquarters of an exceedingly pleasant series of excursions."

So we changed our front, and when people asked us where we were going, replied that we were thinking of Dieppe. Taking the average opinion as our verdict, I am bound to say that Dieppe came off very high up on the list of possible sojourning places.

"Ah, it is a nice little place," said one, "quite the nicest place on the French coast."

"The water supply is splendid," quoth a second.

"The excursions are delightful," said a third.

"I don't like Dieppe," said a fourth. "I lost my money there."

That did not, however, trouble me ; and as Baby was not likely to risk our all on the *Petits Chevaux tables*, it did not trouble my wife. So we decided on going to Dieppe.

Then the question which came uppermost was, should we go to an hotel, as had previously been our wont, should we take a furnished house, an *appartement*, or try for some kind of lodgings ? We inquired among our friends as to hotels, and we wrote to them for terms, and I am bound to say that the more modest was the hotel, the more exorbitant were the charges.

"Go to the Hotel St. Denys," said one friend. "I assure you it is like going home ; so moderate even in the very height of the season, much cheaper than we could live at home, everything so comfortable, a regular do-as-you-like place, everything friendly and nice and jolly."

For my own part, I don't care for hotels where they are "friendly and nice and jolly" ; I like to preserve my own identity as much as possible. However, I wrote to the Hotel St. Denys, asking terms for two bedrooms and a sitting-room, full board and lodging for myself, wife, child, and nurse.

For a moderate hotel, in which one could live much cheaper than one could live at home, I must confess that the answer of the proprietor staggered me. We could not have a private sitting-room—that was out of the question; but they would give us two large bedrooms, and, of course, we should have full use of the drawing and smoking-rooms for ourselves.

“And Baby would have to stay in her bedroom all the time,” said Nell indignantly. “And for such a price, too! Why, it’s perfectly absurd!”

Eventually she consented, although she was none too grand a sailor, to go over with me to look for a suitable casket in which to enshrine Nanna and the precious baby. I did feel that it was very rough luck on her to have to cross twice where once would have sufficed in the ordinary course of events.

“My dear Mrs. Winter,” said one of our many friends the afternoon before we left London, “there is not the smallest occasion for you to suffer so much as a single qualm. Twenty grains of chloral-hydrates, taken as soon as you get on board, will land you in Dieppe as fresh as a bird and as gay as a lark.”

“Fasting?” said Nell interrogatively.

"No, not specially fasting. Have a good breakfast before you start, and have a good bag of sandwiches or dry biscuits with you. Don't go on board hungry, because nothing is so bad as going a sea voyage on an empty stomach."

"Will it hurt me?" asked Nell apprehensively.

"How hurt you?"

"Will it do me any harm?"

"Not the least in the world; it may send you to sleep, or nearly to sleep; but that is all. It will cost you about fourpence."

We stopped at a chemist's on our way home in order to get the prescription made up.

"I feel that I am not going to be ill this time, Jack," said Nell to me, as we emerged from the shop.

I feel, in strict justice to the friend who gave us the recipe, and in the interests of suffering humanity in all parts of the world, that I ought to say that the prescription was completely efficacious, and that the following day we arrived in Dieppe, Nell not having suffered so much as a single qualm. She had not been foolish; she had given the medicine a chance of working, for she had retired to her berth as soon as we went on board, and she never

moved until we were past the *Calvaires* at the entrance to the harbour.

My first impression of Dieppe, as we passed in between the *Calvaires* set at either side of the entrance to the harbour, between the tall white cliffs on the left and the tall white houses on the right, was that we had got to a foreign-looking town at last. Indeed, it seemed, when we left the sea behind us, as if we had passed into a quiet corner of another world. There was quite a crowd to see us land. We had but just saved our bacon in making the harbour, the bottom of the vessel ploughing up the mud as we came in, telling us thereby that had we been a quarter of an hour later, we should have missed harbour and have had to wait until the tide rose sufficiently to permit us to enter. As Nell came up from the ladies' cabin, and saw the tall ladder up which she must climb to reach the quay, she turned and looked at me with something like dismay in her eyes.

"Jack," she said, "is it always like this? Will Nanna have to climb up that dreadful ladder? I don't believe she would ever get up, even if you carried Baby."

I burst out laughing at the thought of old Nanna waddling up that gangway.

"No, no," I said soothingly, "it's all right; we happen to have come when the tide is very low, but we will take care that when we come back again we will choose a day so that we arrive on the top of the tide."

As we gained the quay and found ourselves on terra-firma, we found ourselves also face to face with a gaping multitude, who had come to see the boat arrive. These people were all standing on a raised platform some three or four feet wide, which ran along the front of the store houses, and was, indeed, not put there for the cultivation of gape-seed, but to facilitate the lifting of goods from the goods shed into the railway trucks. We safely passed the ordeal of the Douane, and, going straight ahead, found ourselves on the platform whence the Paris train departed. Half the train was labelled "Cook's Party." I remarked to Nell as we passed up the platform that without doubt Mr. Cook is a beneficent being, who has shed pleasure and enjoyment on thousands of persons who must otherwise have done without it, or without him have indulged in pleasures of a less novel and interesting kind. Just then a little waiter, flourishing a napkin, came along towards us.

"Twenty-five minutes for lonche," he said, with

stentorian lungs. "Take your seats; plenty of time; twenty-five minutes for *lonche*."

"I am glad," said Nell, as we passed on, leaving the little man to think that we were coming back for lunch in two minutes, "that he pointed out the first-class to us. I have no doubt, Jack dear, that Cook is a great benefactor and makes everybody very happy; but just imagine if one had to take Baby with all those young men who persist in smoking, and all those young women in short skirts who want the windows open."

"I don't suppose," I replied, "that anybody ever took a baby on a Cook's Excursion! At all events we won't! We will go to the Royal, don't you think, dearest?"

"Wherever you like, Jack," was her reply.

"It is no use our making ourselves uncomfortable for the two or three days we are here. I should say the Hotel Royal will do us excellently well."

A moment later we had passed the rails in front of the train—yes, it did seem rather dangerous, my reader, but one is on very intimate terms with the trains in Dieppe—and had reached the street, where a line of hotel busses and interpreters were waiting to swoop down on such passengers as were remaining the night in the town. Apparently they

expected no more visitors for the Hotel Royal that day, for, as soon as we were settled, the door of the omnibus was shut to with a bang, and we were rattling away along the stony streets, which always, somehow or other, make me think of Brussels and that last gay night before the troops turned out to the greatest victory of the century.

CHAPTER IV.

A DEAR LITTLE COT.

WE found the Hotel Royal everything that the heart of man or woman could desire. It stands about the centre of the Plage, directly facing the sea, and the sea that July afternoon was perfect. I have heard many tales of wonderful storms along that particular bit of coast, of hardy fishermen going out to wrest a little hard-won bread from troubled waters; I have seen the boats go out in strings at the tail of a pert little tug, every man doffing his cap as he passed the *Calvaires* set at the entrance to the harbour, every head bent for a moment or so in prayer. I know that the sea is treacherous, that many lives are yearly offered up as a sacrifice to human needs on its broad, uncertain bosom; but as I stood at the window of our room in the Hotel Royal on the day of our arrival in

Dieppe, gazing out over the wide stretch of ocean, I might have been forgiven for looking upon her only as a smooth-mannered, easy, beneficent mother, whose maternal bosom was never ruffled, whose blue eyes were always glinting with complacent sunlight; or as a happy wooer of the grim old castle, topping the crags at the extreme left of the Plage beyond the Casino.

What a day! What a scene! Blue as we always fondly think of the Mediterranean in general and the Bay of Naples in particular, glinting forth a thousand, nay, a myriad rays of light under the blazing sun, here and there a white or rich red-brown sail, reminding one of the line from "The Ancient Mariner"—

"A painted ship upon a painted ocean,"

and as I stood there, I thanked God for having brought me to the fringe of the eternal sea yet once again.

I was still drinking in the beauty of sea and sky and picturesque crag, when Nell came to the window and put her arm through mine.

"It is lovely, isn't it?" she said, nestling close to me, as she always does when she is much pleased. "It is the very place for us, Jack: the wide sea-

front, this great stretch of grass, those sheltered seats, the pebbled beach beyond, where Nanna can sit for hours in the sun if she likes. No great distance to get anywhere, no steep cliffs to climb that would tire the old woman to death. We could not have chosen a place more absolutely good for us all. Nanna can go to the Casino and listen to the concerts, or she can take that dear little tram and go down to the pier. It is an ideal place, Jack."

I really did think that we had pitched upon the right place for our headquarters, and I told her so.

"I think it is perfection," she said happily; "but come, dear, they have brought us our tea; then we will go out and explore the town a little."

I felt very proud of her as I saw her a quarter of an hour later settling herself, woman's fashion, before the glass in the door of the wardrobe. She is so smart and trig, that wife of mine; she looked so natty that day in her neat serge gown, which had the unmistakable cut of a good tailor about it. On her smoothly-coiled hair she was wearing a white sailor hat with a blue ribbon. On her hands she wore white gloves with black stitching, and in lieu of a sunshade she carried a cherry-wood stick, with her initials in silver upon it. I believe there is a

certain type of woman who thinks that nothing matters after she is once married. But what a mistake she makes! If such women knew how proud a man feels of a wife who is well turned out, dainty and smart, the frump would be as obsolete as the dodo.

I remember once, years ago, when I was a little chap, my father coming in to luncheon one day and my mother asking him where he had been.

"Oh," said he, "I have been in to see So-and-So," naming a certain cleric, who afterwards found a seat on the Bench and proved a shining light of the reverend and august body which occupies that desirable position.

"Did you see Mrs. So-and-So?" asked my mother.

"Oh, yes, she came into the study. She sent her kind regards to you."

"She is a nice woman," observed my mother, in a meditative voice.

"I don't know," answered my father shortly, "I don't know that she is."

"Oh, my dear Henry," said my mother, in accents of extreme surprise, "what makes you say that?"

"Well, she had grease spots on the front of her

gown. I know it was the morning, and that she might have been busy," said my father, "but somehow I don't think a woman can be really nice who has grease spots on the front of her gown."

And to the last day of his life, I must confess that my father never forgave Mrs. So-and-So those grease spots.

"Do you think," said Nell, as we passed through the hotel gates, "that we had better try the front for a beginning, or go to a house agent?"

"Well, for my own part, I have no faith in house-hunting without a house agent," I replied; "but how would it be if we sauntered round first and got the place into our minds, so to speak?"

"Yes, we could do that."

We turned to the right and walked down the Plage towards the pier. There were many notices up—"Appartements meublés grands et petits à louer présentement."

"I think they must be expecting a very bad season," said Nell; "did you ever see so many house and lodging bills, Jack?"

I never had done; but things are not always what they seem, and we proved the truth of the saying that day. Door after door we tried, bell after bell we rang, and one civil French person

after another sent us away with a shake of the head and many regrets that they could not accommodate us. Oh, yes, the board was there, they never took the board down; it was there all the year round. Or they were full until the end of August. Or they had a nice little *appartement* on the fifth floor. But, as Nell very truly said, the thought of our stout old Nanna toiling up to an *appartement* on the fifth floor with that solid child in her arms was a very just cause and impediment to our doing business.

"You see, madame," quoth one worthy dame, "we seldom have anything unlet at this time in July, for we have the same families year after year from Paris and from England, and in July it is only by chance that we have anything to let. You will have a better chance of getting something in the Faubourg than on the Plage itself."

Sadder and wiser, we betook ourselves to the bureau of Monsieur Mallet, situated in the Grande Rue. Monsieur Mallet was distinctly more hopeful of being able to accommodate us exactly to our liking.

"You would like to be on the front," he said. "Well, I have a charming little house at the far

end of the Plage, a great bargain—three thousand francs for the Season.”

Three thousand francs for the season ! I began to feel sympathy with the person in the nursery rhyme who said :

“ It is enough to make a man
Scratch his head and think ! ”

Monsieur Mallet gave us cards to view several houses in the Faubourg and one set of flats. There again we found that the ground, first and second floors were already taken. Another villa in the Rue des Fontaines was quite moderate in price, and charming both as to furniture and position, but unfortunately, it stood upon rising ground, and a flight of steps from the gate to the front door at once made Nell vote against it.

“ My dear boy, think of Nanna going up and down those steps two or three times a day,” she said. “ Why, the poor old woman would be tired to death before she got outside the premises, and worn out before she got beyond the gate. And fancy getting Baby’s car up and down every time she went out ! Charming for a grown-up family, Jack, and so cheap, but not for a stout nurse and a healthy baby. Oh no ! ”

Eventually we lighted on a nice little house in the Faubourg, quite near to the British Consulate. Though it was most unpretending without, within it was charmingly arranged, beautifully furnished, exquisitely clean, and it also boasted of the electric light. For the sum of thirty-six pounds paid down, this little domicile, with two fair-sized sitting-rooms, five bedrooms, a kitchen, and a little garden, full of wine-coloured roses, could be ours for the next three months. I wrote a cheque on the spot. The only drawback seemed to be that there was no sea view; but the sea was only just round the corner, so to speak, and, as Madame la Propriétaire explained, it was a very lively road, with carriages continually passing to and fro on the road to Pourville.

"Don't you think, Jack," said Nell to me, as we walked away down the town again, "don't you think that we have hit upon a real bargain?"

"It certainly is not dear," I replied.

"So beautifully furnished—old china and a piano, and those two nice rooms in front for Nanna and the baby—nothing could be better. I feel, Jack, that I am going to enjoy my holiday immensely."

"That's all right," I replied. "Hullo! Come across the road and look at this shop."

I veered across the road and so did she, and we pulled up in front of an old curiosity shop, with contents such as simply made my mouth water. What took me, however, more than anything of the treasures of lace, of paste, of silver, of pictures, of pots, were a couple of huge copper cauldrons engraved richly, and unmistakably of great age. I asked the price.

"A hundred and twenty francs," was the reply.

"For the two?"

"For one, monsieur."

I said "Thank you," and walked out.

"Pretty stiff that," said Nell, with a laugh, as we sailed away down the street.

We wandered away down the Grande Rue, looking in all the shop windows, and finally arrived at the Café Suisse, and the adjacent fish market.

"Let us see how prices run," said Nell.

We stopped at the stall of a handsome old fish-woman, who was clamouring at us in a wholly unknown tongue.

Nell stood and surveyed the slate slab spread out with its fishy contents.

"*Quel prix?*" she demanded, pointing with her

white-gloved finger to the ugliest fish I have ever seen in my life. "*Quel prix ?*" said my wife sweetly.

"*Quel prix, madame ?*" repeated the vendress volubly. "*Soixante ; très bon poisson, de la première fraîcheur. Très bon marché aujourd'hui —soixante.*"

"*Soixante,*" said Nell ; "why, that's sixty ! Does she mean sixty francs ?"

"*Quel prix, madame ?*" I asked.

"*Trois francs, monsieur.*" Then, with a curious crumpling of her weather-beaten visage, she, with a distinct effort and exactly in the tone that a parrot might have used, came out with "'Arf a crown."

"I think it's rather dear, don't you, Jack ?" said Nell, then turned with her charming smile to the old fish-woman. "*Merci, madame, un autre jour.*"

But do you think that woman was going to let English customers go so easily ?

"*Monsieur—madame—madame—monsieur !*" she called. "*Ici, ici, madame ! Madame, cinquante-cinq !*"

My wife put up her hand with a gesture of refusal.

"Let us see how much the old woman will come down to," I suggested.

"We don't want the thing," Nell said warningly; "and if you beat her down too far, you'll have to take it."

"*Trop cher, madame*," I remarked bluntly.

"*Non, monsieur, pas de tout, du tout. Non, madame.*"

"*Oui, trop cher*," said Nell.

"*Cinquante*," was the immediate reply.

Myself I thought fifty sous exceedingly dear for a hideous thing like that, even if it was of the *première fratcheur*; for I had dropped down to it that it was the custom to sell by sous, and fifty sous means twenty-five pennies. "*Trop cher, madame.*"

I don't know whether you will believe it, but haggling brought that old lady down to such a considerable extent that before we left the *Poissonnerie* I had reduced the price of that hideous, dolphin-like fish to one franc twenty! I found out afterwards that eightpence should have been the top price; but that was not until we had bought our experience in that severe school which is the only one in which fools will learn, they say.

I took the trouble of politely explaining to the old lady that as we were staying at an hotel, we did not see our way to buying her wares. She wasted no more words upon us ; but, thrusting her hands into her trouser pockets—well, I mean her skirt pockets—for, somehow, all the fish-women in Dieppe seem to be blessed with those masculine appendages to comfort—she turned to her neighbour, muttering something of which I only caught the word *Anglais*, spat upon the flags before her, and wasted no more arguments upon us.

CHAPTER V.

THE CASINO.

AFTER dinner we went to the Casino. There was a concert on in the Salle des Fêtes, which was pretty well filled in every part. We only got in for the tail end of the first part, but we heard a pianist who was quite out of the common. He was young, and wore his hair long, but his playing was wonderful. The audience seemed to think so, too, and we all clapped vociferously when he came to an end. He came back and bowed, but was not to be drawn for a repetition of his performance. Then there was half an hour's interval, when all the world rushed to the Petits Chevaux and tried how much money they could lose. They meant, of course, to win, poor lambs; but I think they mostly lost, if you could judge by their faces.

"Come, it is stupid," said Nell, who has nothing

of the gambler about her. "Let us go on to the terrace and see what there is at the end of this gallery."

"You can have a drink or an ice if you like," I suggested.

"Not an ice; no, dear. Let us go and look at the list of things."

We sauntered away down the corridor leading to the Buffet and to the terrace; and just as Nell, who had stopped before a tariff card, said, "Jack, you can have a whisky soda or a lemon-Scotch," we happened a misfortune. It was a human misfortune. We are fond, nowadays, of talking of human documents; this particular human document was very well known in semi-smart, semi-Bohemian society in London.

"My dear Mrs. Winter!" she exclaimed—"and Mr. Winter, too! Who would have thought of seeing you in Dieppe?"

Nell turned with a start.

"Oh, Mrs. Garside—how do you do? Well, who would have thought of seeing *you* in Dieppe!"

Nell is always extra civil to Mrs. Garside, because I dislike her so much. I think, poor child, she is always afraid that I shall be drawn into saying something rude.

"Oh, but you know, Dieppe belongs to us—we adore Dieppe—we discovered it! We have been here every year since I was sixteen."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that she must have been there a good many times, but the pressure of Nell's fingers on my arm detained me.

"We have just taken a house for the season."

"You don't say so! Where now?"

"A little house—very tiny—in the Faubourg la Barre—quite near to the British Consulate."

"Oh, yes, I know—a sweet little place. I am sure you will be most comfortable there. Such a nice position—so much nicer than being in the Rue Aguado, you know. You are sure to love Dieppe. You know, it is the most extraordinary thing—such a little simple place, and yet people come here again and again, year after year. It is like Venice, you know, and Florence—"

"Oh, no," said Nell involuntarily.

"I don't mean to look at, dear lady; I mean in the affection that it inspires in those who come to it. It is quite a joke that people who once come to Dieppe always come back again."

"Well, I hope we shall like it. Where are you staying?"

"Oh, we have a flat—a first floor—in the Rue

Aguado. We couldn't live off the Plage for the world!"

"But I thought you said it was nicer in the Faubourg!" exclaimed Nell.

"Yes, it really is nicer; but, you see, we are such a large family, and it was not easy to get the sized flat we wanted in the Faubourg. When one brings a family, one has to consider so many things."

"Oh, yes, yes, of course. Are there many people you know here?" Nell asked, evidently feeling that it was not safe to go on with the question of locality any further.

"A few; but of course by the end of the month there will be many more. Dear Mrs. Archie Cavan came yesterday."

"Mrs. Cavan!" said Nell, with a distinct increase of distance in her tone. "Oh, is she a friend of yours?"

"Oh, I quite understand you," said Mrs. Garside. "Of course, I know so many people are prejudiced about her, poor thing; but I like always to see good in everybody."

"Oh, yes, that is very sweet of you," said Nell; but her tone was distinctly unbending.

Nell is not a person without prejudices, and Mrs.

Archie Cavan happens to be one of her pet aversions. And apparently without in the least realising this, for the next half hour did that blessed woman drivel on, passing from one subject to another, and always in the same determined spirit to see the best of everybody. For my part, I was unutterably bored! I am not fond of people who never say a word against anyone, who will find something sweet and pleasant to say even about those whom, you know perfectly well, they loathe in their heart of hearts. To me such characters are most of anything like castor oil: there is a smoothness about them which is nauseating. I took the two ladies to have a lemon-squash, and then we found ourselves back in the gambling-room again, and Mrs. Garside turned as if by instinct to the tables.

"Oh, do you care about those things?" said Nell rather disdainfully.

"The little horses!" remarked Mrs. Garside, with enthusiasm. "Oh, I love them! They are the very salt and savour of life! I believe that is why people come to Dieppe so often."

"They don't attract me," said Nell; "I think they are so stupid going round and round. I think the music is much preferable."

So we shook the dust of the little horses, and of Mrs. Garside, off our feet, and went back to the Salle des Fêtes, where Nell seemed to be enjoying herself immensely.

We were enjoying our breakfast under the covered verandah of the hotel the next morning, when Mrs. Garside broke in upon our *tête-à-tête*.

"Ah, then, you are staying here," she said. "I have been to two hotels to look for you! Somehow, I never thought of your coming to the Royal. I came to ask you if you would go out to Arques with us this afternoon and have tea there?"

"Oh, you are very kind indeed," said Nell, with an alacrity which was suspiciously spontaneous; "but we are going back by the boat to-day."

"Going back! I thought you were going to stay three months."

"We are; but we only came over to look for a house; we are not really here yet."

"Oh, how unnecessary! If you had only written to me, I would have done it for you."

"It is most kind of you, Mrs. Garside," my wife said, in a tone of gratitude; "but, you see, we didn't know that you were here, and, in any case, we should not have liked to trouble you. I think," she added, with a laugh, "that it is a thankless

office taking houses for one's friends ; they mostly want something that it is not possible to get, and they mostly want it for nothing."

"Oh, yes, that is so—that is quite true," Mrs. Garside admitted. "Personally, though, I have been most singularly fortunate in the friends for whom I have performed that office. I took Mrs. Archie's rooms for her, and she is delighted with them ; but then she is so sweet, it is a pleasure to do anything for her. I am now looking out for a house for Lady Drumdry ; but then she is very easy to please and money is no object with her."

"Lady Drumdry ! That is the lady with the red hair, is it not ?" said Nell.

"Nell's voice is just like a barometer to me ; I can almost tell by her tone the thoughts that are passing through her mind. That she knew Lady Drumdry as well as she knew Mrs. Archie Cavan—that is to say, by sight—was an indisputable fact.

"Yes, the Venetian Venus they call her," said Mrs. Garside, gushingly. "The painters are quite mad about her. Goodall was most anxious she should sit for his great picture of Bathsheba."

"And did she ?" my wife asked.

"Well, she half-promised, but she was not able to manage it when the time came. She was here the

year before last ; I got her her house then. Such a pleasure to do anything for her, she is so charming. Then you think you won't be able to come to Arques with us ? ”

“ Oh, thank you, not to-day. You see we go at half-past one.”

“ Won't you stay for the night and go to-morrow, or go by the night boat ? ”

“ No, thank you, we have telegraphed to them at home to expect us. So kind of you to ask us,” Nell said, with her most winsome manner. “ Some other time—not to-day—you see it is impossible.”

Mrs. Garside wasted no more time upon us. She told us that we were very naughty, and that she should claim our promise as soon as we were settled comfortably.

“ And you will let me know when you are coming back again, and I will see that everything is ready for you. By the bye, have you got a cook ? ”

“ We are going to bring our own cook,” said Nell ; “ we are going to bring our own servants, thank you very much. Indeed, I don't think that we shall want anything ; there will be no need to trouble you ; but it is most kind of you, Mrs. Garside. I really cannot thank you enough.”

“ My dear,” I said to Nell, as she passed out of

the gates, "what induced you to be so civil to that woman?"

"I wasn't very civil to her, Jack," said Nell, reproachfully.

"But you were; you were most awfully nice to her. Why didn't you tell her plump out that you wouldn't go to her tea-party now or any time?"

"Oh, I couldn't, Jack; it would be so rude."

"Yes, I know it would; but she has gone away now with the impression that you are the dearest friend she has in the world."

"Oh, Jack, she couldn't do that!"

"My dear, I assure you that good lady has gone away thinking me a sulky brute, and that but for me you would be her dearest bosom friend. She thinks you are dying to go to her tea-party at Arques."

"Oh, Jack, she couldn't!"

"Well, you know what it will be—we shall come back again, and she will make a tea at Arques, or somewhere else, and you will hum and haw and make excuses, and expect me to get you out of it in the end."

"But, Jack, it would have been so rude."

"It would have been rude, but it would have been wise. We are coming back for three months, and we don't want to have that woman froze on to us for the whole time."

"Well, I can't help it Jack," said Nell, with a tired air. "I can't be rude to people, and if you have to get me out of it, dear, you must get me out of it. Oh, here is Edward Sinclair!" she said, with a change of tone.

"My dear Mrs. Winter! what are you doing in Dieppe?" said the new-comer.

"Taking a house."

"Really? For the season?"

"Yes."

"How delightful! I have made up my mind to spend the season here too: at least, to make this my headquarters, for I have the yacht here. How very delightful to find you and John Strange here. Of course you have taken one of the flats belonging to the hotel?"

"One of the flats belonging to the hotel? Why, we didn't even know that there were any flats."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Winter," he said, "the *dépendance* of the Hotel Royal, in the old mansion where the Duchesse du Berri lived when she made Dieppe the fashion, is quite the choicest corner in the whole town. Is it possible that you haven't seen it?"

"No, nor even heard of it! Well, we have got a charming little house, so let us be satisfied, and don't try to put us out of conceit with it."

CHAPTER VI.

ON DOMICILES.

I HAVE forgotten to say that we were then living in a flat not a hundred miles from Victoria Street. I think I have explained before that our permanent domicile was frequently changed in deference to the necessities of my wife's temperament.

Of all our married life we were really the happiest when we lived at Putney. It was so near to town as to be practically town itself, and yet it was far enough away to be almost the country. The house we occupied was fresh and spacious and reasonable. We loved Putney. In all our after lives, if we should live to be a thousand years old, both of us, I think that we shall retain a tender memory of that terrace of beautiful old houses by the river, which was not really so old but yet which had all the charms and dignity of serene old age. It had a terraced garden sloping down to the river, and the river itself flowed silently past the broken

and moss-grown pilasters of the balustrade, which flanked the broad gravelled walk on the lowest level of all. We had always declared that nothing short of a revolution should turn us out of the Cedars, and we kept our word. We endured the throwing of an iron bridge across the river and through the garden; we endured the din of the French devil, by means of which the great cylinders were sunk in the river's bed; we were even proof against drainage scares; but when we received notice to quit, and the houses were sold and pulled down that they might be replaced by a few hideous little red brick doll-houses, then it became not a question of going out but of getting out.

From Putney we went to Nevern Square, but even with the aid of a much-loved farmhouse in the country, whither we migrated for the summer months, we did not hold out very long in that most convenient and comely of London localities. Then we pitched our tent at Bridgeway, in a pure Jacobean house, picturesque of aspect, glorious in tradition—as my wife said, “Everything that I have dreamed of having all my life long!” How miserable we were in Bridgeway!—how miserable, I think, nobody but Nell and myself will ever know! Thank heaven,

that dream is a nightmare of the past, and our ideal for the next thirty years, if we live as long, will be to dwell in modern mansions, less picturesque, perhaps, but more pronounced as to comfort and healthiness.

"Jack," said my wife piteously to me, when we were finally scraping the dust of Bridgeway off our rejoicing feet, "I would like to try a flat."

"A flat!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, Jack, a nice, new, modern, convenient flat, with no ghost, and no panelled walls, no historical associations, no beetles, no mice, no rats, no dust of ages coming from the walls and floor with every puff of wind that blows, and spreading the disease of centuries on our devoted heads. A flat, Jack! If we are not able to get a ground floor, dear, let us have one at the top flat of all. Surely, if we were to go to the top floor, to which we should ascend by a lift, it would be the same thing in effect as living on the street level, but much higher than the ground on which our house stood."

I told her that such would not be the case. However, I saw that she was set upon a flat, and as I only exist for Nell's benefit—as the charming song puts it—

"Do her behests in pleasure or in pain—"

I stifled my own inclinations, and went with her to look for suitable tenements, so arranged as only to occupy one single floor.

I think that there must have been something of the lamb going to the slaughter about my air, for Nell was particularly tender and gentle with me.

"Dear old boy," she said, when we had been over three flats, and had found them wholly unsuitable to our requirements, "do you mind *very* much?"

"My dear," I replied, "I mind nothing so long as you are well and happy. If you don't like this flat when you have decided upon it, there is just one thing to remember—that we cannot afford to remove again under three years."

"Never again, Jack," she said eagerly.

I laughed aloud. It has been "never again" since we took our first tiny house when we were a struggling young couple without two sixpences to rub together, and Nell's chief aim and ambition during a whole six months was to be in a position to have two of the tiny dolls' houses of the street in which we first began our married life knocked into one. Three times since I have been married

have I put my hand to a twenty-one years' lease under the beguilement of Nell's "never again." I am devoted to her; there is nothing within the power of mortal man that I would not do for her; but I have quite made up my mind—and she knows it—to one thing, which is, that never again will I sign a lease as long as I live. A three years' agreement is the outside period for which I will make myself liable.

So we eventually took a flat, as I said, not a mile from Victoria Street, and on a three years' agreement. It was a bargain—every house we ever go to is a bargain—and for a few weeks Nell lived in a seventh heaven of arranging the same. I must confess that I rather liked it myself. I loathe and detest stairs; it suits my indulgent nature to get into a cupboard, and be wafted to the top storey of a solid mansion without the trouble of doing five minutes on the treadmill; I like to feel that my home is under my own thumb, so to speak. When I lived in France I was always glad of the concierge. I think the concierge system a most useful and agreeable one. I have heard foolish people say that it is dreadful to be spied upon—to have somebody who knows every time you go out

and every time you come in. Well, for my part, I have not the smallest desire to murder anybody; I do not belong to any secret societies, and I have not the smallest wish to keep my daily life a dark chapter. It seems to me that well-living, respectable people need not mind if all the world knows what time they go out and what time they come in; whether they have one visitor in the day or fifty; whether they use one sack of coals or two; if there is nothing in one's life to be ashamed of, why should one wish to keep that life wholly a secret? I may be wrong, but that is my opinion.

Then, on the other hand, what a blessing is your concierge or doorkeeper under certain circumstances. Does anyone try to fix upon you a crime of which you are, of course, not guilty, and you can bring your concierge's book to show that between the hours of nine and twelve you never left the house. What a convenience that is. The crime of which you are accused was committed at half-past ten, so there is no more to be said on the subject; you have proved a strictly professional *alibi*. Then, do you wish to remain undisturbed, you can tell your concierge or doorkeeper that you will see no visitor

of any kind whatever before three o'clock in the afternoon, and if that concierge knows his duty, no visitor has so much as a look in. You want to have the windows cleaned, a charwoman, a jobbing tailor, a message taking, a letter posting, a cab calling, the doctor fetching in a hurry—concierge manages it all, and you give him your tip every month, or every quarter, according to your custom, and you feel that it is money as well laid out as any that has slipped your fingers during the course of the entire year.

In London the advantages are very great. Do you desire to go away for a few days it is all right. Your guardian in the hall takes your keys, and you can entrust him with everything. No fear of burglars, no need of a care-taker, who may be all right, but who, on the other hand, may be all wrong. You can turn your back on your household gods with a light heart; you can leave the cat and the dog if necessary, and you make it worth the porter's while. Indeed, indeed, the advantages of the hall-porter or concierge system are many, the disadvantages only such as would weigh with ill-living people, who are afraid of the daylight of public opinion.

This chapter reminds me of the old riddle, "When is a door not a door?" I might put it,

"When is a digression not a digression?" When it is on the subject of domiciles. And yet, although it is a digression, in another sense it is not a digression, for I would prefer that my readers should know precisely who I am when I am at home. Everything in this world is relative; one judges of everything by comparison, and the history of a summer holiday would not be complete, unless the reader had some standpoint of imagination to work from.

Nell had lasted out longer in that flat, without showing any sign of nerve exhaustion, than in any house in which we had lived since we had set up housekeeping together. It was high up, quiet and compact, without being cramped. We had no spare room, although we could offer a friend a shakedown in my dressing-room when we wished to do so. It is very convenient not to have a regular spare room when you are living within a shilling cab fare of the theatres and most other points of interest in London. But mind, when I speak of a shilling cab fare, I don't mean to imply that I have ever the meanness or the impudence to take a cab from Victoria Street to any of the theatres, and to offer cabby his legal fare. Cabby's life is a hard one, full of chill and disappointment, and I am convinced

that I shall never feel the pangs of hunger for the sake of the extra sixpences that I have bestowed upon various members of that deserving community.

I remember once being in a railway train just about to start when the door was flung open, and a lady and gentleman tumbled into the compartment.

"Upon my word," said the lady, when she could get her breath, "that fool of a man nearly lost us the train! Then we should have had to stay over Sunday. And you so quiet—really, George, you are most aggravating!"

"Well, my dear," said George, in a mild voice, "I called him a damned fool, and I gave him his legal fare; I don't know what more you would have a man do!" at which we all, including the panting and irate lady, burst out laughing, and compared notes on the general excellence of cabmen.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF AT LAST !

NELL and I had never been accustomed to make much fuss over a trip to the Continent, but it is wonderful what a difference the advent of a baby makes in that respect. You see, never in our lives before had we left our own home burdened by domestics. Our intention had been to take Nanna and the cook only, and to make shift as best we could without a parlour maid. I don't know why people who go away for a holiday should make themselves thus uncomfortable by doing without all the usual decencies of life, because one's holiday does one as much good when one is roughing it as when one has one's ordinary amount of comfort. I know two sisters who go abroad every summer for a fortnight. They are middle-aged women, employed in earning their bread by the very arduous task of keeping a fashionable boarding-school. A portion of their yearly holiday is spent among their

relations; but they make a rule of taking one fortnight, and of living during that fortnight absolutely without stint.

"Sometimes," one of them said to me not long ago, "we go to Paris; that is when we take our special fortnight at Easter. Sometimes we go further afield. When we feel that we have done well, we take a more expensive journey. We have been to Berlin, to Dresden, to Munich, to Florence, to Venice, and to Rome; we have travelled straight to the place of our destination; we have gone to the best hotel; and we have lived as if we were millionaires. Our relations think we are mad. They say, 'Why, you could live for the whole two months of your holidays in a good boarding-house, or in first-class lodgings at Scarborough or Whitby; it is silly to squeeze all your holiday into one fortnight!' But it is not silly," declared my friend positively. "Our fortnight does us more good than a whole year of life in a boarding-house or in seaside lodgings would do. Once or twice we have been unable to get away, feeling that we could not afford an expensive journey or expensive hotels just then. And do you know what we have done? We have stayed at home, we have had a brougham for a fortnight, and we have gone to a

theatre every night of our lives, after dining at a good restaurant, and having had tea at some smart little place in Bond Street, and lunch somewhere else. Even without any change of air at all, but just this change of living—which does not come so very expensive—the result is marvellous in counteracting nerve exhaustion and the dull monotony of every-day existence. Everybody cannot go to the Riviera for the winter—that is manifestly impossible; and if one has only ten or fifteen pounds to spare for one's holiday, one had better spend it in a good burst of luxury in London, than waste it on railway travelling, and eke it out in pokey lodgings or snuffy boarding-houses."

The reason that we came to take the admirable Potter away with us was this; when the idea of exodus was first mooted, Potter remarked, in a tone which indicated that her company was a foregone conclusion, that, since the house was so small, and Annie was about to be married, if we did not mind a little less in the way of waiting, it would be better not to replace Annie until our return to town. Somehow Nell had not the heart to tell the admirable Potter that we had actually contemplated leaving her on board wages.

"I really couldn't, Jack," she said to me;

"Potter looked at me—you know that way Potter has of looking you through and through in a manner as if you were a sort of Babe in the Wood, and could not possibly get along without her assistance—and when you come to think of it, it would really mean my doing a lot. What do you really think?" I let her remark pass. "What do you think? Had we better take her? After all, it would be a great bother to have nobody to answer the door, and, as we are going away for a holiday, we may as well make ourselves comfortable—as comfortable, that is to say, as circumstances will permit."

Somehow the decision made me think of a letter that Nell had had a year or two back from a dear woman staying with her family on the Norfolk Broads; when I say the Norfolk Broads, I mean that this particular family were camping out in that neighbourhood. They were a large family, somewhat different in tastes and interests. The letter ran something like this:

"MY DEAR MRS. WINTER,—I have been meaning every day, for the last three weeks, to write to you, for I am wondering how you are at your dear Wix, and Mr. Winter, and those darling chicks."

("Those darling chicks," by the bye, were Phyllis, Jackie, and Cis Dare, the children of Nell's sister, who were with us during their parents' absence in India.¹) "We are having a splendid time here, seventeen in family, though where we put it up would be difficult to say. My husband has a sweet yacht in the bay that has three berths, and two of the boys and my youngest brother sleep there ; all the others get in where they can. The yacht goes out every day, making a trip somewhere or other but I don't join them often, as, though not a bad sailor, I dislike the sensation of being on water ; it gives me a sort of neuralgia, which thoroughly damps any pleasure I might otherwise feel from it. They get plenty of duck-shooting and fishing, and the girls are having a splendid time. I find a great difficulty in provisioning a family so large, as everything apparently goes straight to the London market ; even fish—except what we catch ourselves, which isn't very nice to eat—is extremely difficult to get hold of. Charlie cut his leg to the bone one day last week, and has been more or less laid up ever since. The servants hate it, as this cottage is three miles from everywhere, and they can only take walks with each other.

¹ See "A Soldier's Children."

Cook grumbles for want of her well-found kitchen at home, and I feel a certain satisfaction in remembering that, when she grumbles later on, I shall be able to remind her of the many things she said in extollation of her own kitchen during her stay here. The advertisement and the agent's description made us think that this place would be a paradise. It is badly furnished, draughty, and the beds are horrid. I am longing for the night when I shall find myself once more on my own good spring bed, with at least nine hours of perfect rest before me. I do so wish that my husband would let us furnish a holiday house of our own; it could be as plain and simple as possible, so that one could leave it easily in the winter—but the beds should be beyond reproach. The unfortunate part of it is that the children love to go to a fresh place every year, so that I am afraid that my wish will never be accomplished. Still, we are having a splendid time—we tell ourselves so twenty times a day. I, frankly, am longing to get home again."

Dear woman, she never did have a holiday home—the ideal little house in the country, with muslin curtains, a kitchen garden, an orchard, and a tennis ground—for before the next holiday season

came round again she had found a bed in which she could sleep peacefully for ever. I have often wondered whether that six weeks of pining for her own comfortable couch hastened her end.

So Potter went. And cook's mother came to say good-bye to her. I should not have minded if she had come to the house, but she came to the station—and she cried. She howled, and she roared, and she sobbed ; she made quite a scene, and we were the observed of all observers. She was like Falstaff, fat and scant of breath ; she was convinced that Mouncey would never come back again, alive or dead.

At last I said to her :

“My good woman, do you think I am going to take your daughter away among cannibals ? She will arrive in Dieppe in plenty of time to cook our dinner to-night ; it is as short a journey as that.”

“Oh, but if she should get married to a Frenchman there,” the old fool sobbed.

“Can you give your daughter anything over a hundred pounds ?” I said, in answer to this.

“A hundred pounds !” The very tears froze upon her cheeks. “A hundred pounds ! Why, sir, Mary and me hasn't a hundred pence in the world !”

"Then," I said, "you may rest quite assured she is perfectly safe. No woman is married in France unless she has a *dot*—a *dot* means a fortune—and I don't think anything under a hundred pounds will settle Mouncey's fate this journey!"

Mouncey herself, who was delighted at the prospect of a jaunt in a foreign country, laughed outright, and clapped her timorous and anxious mother upon the broad expanse of strained material which she called her back.

"Lor', mother, how can you be so silly?" she said, with an amount of good sense that made my very heart rejoice, and lessened the length of Nell's face by at least a couple of inches. "As if master would take missis and the darling baby anywhere where it wasn't quite safe! One would think I was a kid of five years old going to be carried off by a band of gipsies. As to marrying a Frenchman—I'd like to see the Frenchman that would marry me!"

I was not quite so sure about that myself. There is a something about Mouncey—who is young and well-favoured—which is dangerously attractive to anything masculine in gender. The estimable Potter, most perfect of parlour-maids, who has been with us ever since we could afford

that luxury, is never troubled by such anxieties and worries, but there is a bit of a blink in Mouncey's soft brown eyes which I fancy causes an infinite amount of trouble during the course of the twelve months.

"Sure, and do ye think," remarked Nanna, as Mrs. Mouncey was led sobbing away by a younger daughter, "sure, and do ye think, ma'am, that it'll be quite safe to take me to France? Shure, it's an illigent figure of a woman I am; and if some French divil should take a fancy to me, and should kidnap me and the blessed baby and all, sure and that same would be a calamity to the French nation. Me mother—God rest her sowl in glory—mayhap is looking down and praying to all the saints in the calender to bring me safe back again to the land of me adoption. Get into the carriage, Mary Mouncey, and try and forget that yer mother made such a fool of herself."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOP OF THE TIDE.

WE reached Dieppe this time on the top of the tide. And, by the bye, I have utterly forgotten to mention a most important incident which happened on the day previous to our departure from home.

To those of my friends who have read "A Soldier's Children," I need not explain the Dare family, but everybody has not read that chronicle of childhood, and to them I must explain that my wife's sister is married to a soldier, and that during one memorable spell Nell and I undertook the charge of their three children when they were suddenly ordered to India. That those three children were as dear to us as our own, I need hardly say. We had no child then, our little girl having come on the scene after many years of wedded bliss when we had never thought to be blessed in that way. It happened several years

after the three children had been restored to their parents, that the vicissitudes of life brought them to be quartered at Aldershot. Nell had written to her sister, announcing our intention of spending the summer holiday at Dieppe, and while we were at luncheon on the day previous to our departure, she received a telegram which said—"Don't go out, coming up to see you."

Luncheon was barely over before Nannie Dare appeared.

"No, I don't want any lunch, thank you, dear Nell," she said breathlessly. "How thankful I am to find you in. I was so afraid you might have an engagement and be obliged to go out. You've heard the news about Bob, of course?"

"No, nothing," said Nell. "What has happened?"

"Well, really, dear, I don't quite know, but he has been very unlike himself and very queer for some months past, and yesterday a Board sat on him, and they've given him six months' leave."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes; and we have been casting about in our minds all the evening what we should do with it, where we should go, what we should do with the children. Then your letter came this morning to

say you had really settled on Dieppe, and were going to start at once. Somehow, although I know you had spoken of it once or twice before, I did not believe in it. I never thought you would settle on any place until you had actually got there."

"But only as headquarters, Nannie," said Nell gently.

"Oh, as headquarters. I see. Well, don't you think it would do very well as headquarters for us, too?"

"Oh, yes; how delightful, how delicious!" cried Nell, who was devoted to her sister. "And the children, too?"

"Oh, yes. Why, of course, we could not leave them behind."

"Oh, no; of course not. Oh, how delightful!" again cried Nell, who is also devoted to her sister's children.

"So I came this afternoon, to see if you would look us up a nice place—not too much, you know, dear, not too expensive—and then we would go over some time next week."

"Well, of course," said Nell; "I will look about as soon as ever I get there, and see what is to be had. You know, Jack, there are those flats—the

dépendance of the Hotel Royal—those Edward Sinclair told us about.”

“Oh, Edward Sinclair? What does Edward Sinclair know about Dieppe?” answered Nannie.

“Well, he is going to spend the summer there. He has got his yacht there.”

“Oh, that will be delightful; we can use the yacht for excursions,” said Mrs. Dare deliberately.

“Use the yacht?” said Nell. “Well, I never thought of that! Upon my word, you army ladies are cool! Now, I met Edward Sinclair in Dieppe, and it never occurred to me that I could make use of him to such an extent as that.”

“Very foolish of you, dear,” said Mrs. Dare, with supreme scorn. “Given a seaside place, an unmarried man and a yacht, what more natural combination than that I should use it. Of course, he will give us luncheons, and dinners, and breakfasts, and trips, and all sorts of things. Then I will trust you, dear, to look out some sort of a habitation for us. We don’t want to rough it, because one roughs it in an Aldershot hut quite enough; but, at the same time, I don’t want to spend a fortune.”

“No, no; I quite understand,” said Nell. “And,

dear Nannie, it is delightful to think you are going with us, and those dear children, too."

And then those two women went off to worship at the shrine of that blessed baby; and, I think, that Mrs. Dare might enjoy a chat with old Nanna.

Old Nanna, I must tell you, belonged to the Dares, body and soul. She had nursed Bob Dare when an infant, and she had left his mother to go to Nannie when Phyllis was born. She had stayed there long after there was any need of her, simply because Nannie loved the old woman and hated to be without her. Then, when Nell was on the look-out for a nurse for the precious infant which had been so long wearied, after that we had given up all possible good of hoping for her, Nanna was, as a great favour, lent to us. She was very Irish, was Nanna. Her real name was Bridget O'Rooney. She was very wise, very kind, very motherly; what little Mrs. O'Rooney did not know about babies, you might have put in your eye and been none the worse for. She was an optimistic old soul, too, always prepared for the best, and never prepared to admit the worst until the possibility of taking any other course was absolutely out of the question.

I remember years ago that Cis—one of Nannie's twins—was, while under our charge, very ill of double pneumonia. How wise that old woman was, how hopeful, how encouraging, how full of sound, common, every-day, ordinary sense; how glad I was to see that Nell, who is sensitive to the greatest possible extent, was able to have the advantage of her calm and experienced eye. She is a person who would not be flurried if a baby were sick, or lose her head in the face of any little accidents such as happen in all nurseries.

I found myself, after my wife and her sister had gone out on a mysterious little expedition, which I I guessed meant something at the stores, wandering into the room where Nanna and Baby were always to be found.

"In here, Nanna?" I asked.

"Shure, sorr, come in," was the answer. "Why, my darlint, who's come to see ye?"

The answer was a gurgle, and a determined "Dad, dad, dad," and then there was a patter of sturdy little feet across the floor, and the small sunny face was upturned to mine.

"Well, were you pleased to see Mrs. Dare?" I inquired. "Did you hear the news?"

"Shure an' that same I did, sorr, and it rejoiced

me auld heart. To think of them three blessed darlints being close at hand for three months or more."

"Ah, you will never forget those darlings of yours. I'm afraid this troublesome little person has never quite taken the same place in your heart, Nanna," I remarked.

The old woman looked at me indignantly.

"Shure, me blessed darlint, and what is the father of yer saying? Onfavourably comparing ye with yer blessed cousins. Faith, an' he doesn't mane it, honey Alanna."

It is no use arguing with Nanna, so I sat down and waited till she had finished smothering my daughter with kisses.

"It will be very nice having them over there, won't it?"

"Faith, an' it's plazed that I'll be to see them."

So it was with double satisfaction that Nanna first set her foot upon French soil when we landed at Dieppe on the very top of the tide.

"Shure an' it's a jool of a place," was her first remark when she found herself on the quay. Her next was scarcely so appreciative.

We had safely reached the Douane, and Nanna was standing patiently by with the baby watching

the crowd of passengers, all eagerly pressing after their luggage. Some expression on the old woman's face made me look at her interrogatively.

"Howly Mither in Heaven, sorr," she remarked, after a minute or two of fixed staring at the different officials and passengers, "sorra a bit of a Christian language they use at all, at all."

"Their's is a Christian language, Nanna," I replied.

"Shure, an' is it that same, yer honour. Divil a bit would you know it. Arrah now, kape aisy with yer, or it's a frightenin' of the blessed child ye'll be. An' is it a-jabberin' like that they'd be all the time, sorr?"

"Well, yes, you'll get to understand them presently. After a few weeks you'll feel quite differently about them."

"Begorrah, and wonders 'll never case, sorr. Eh, but they're a mighty quare-looking lot!" And then, as I turned away, I heard her remarking in a rapid undertone to the blithesome cook: "Mary Mouncey, now, jest kape yer eyes aisy in yer head; yer niver know what these foreign chaps 'll be arter. There's coontries where ye can marry people in jest, and marrying in jest, like marrying in haste, mostly manes repenting at leisure. Arrah, now, kape

them eyes of yours still in your head, and you lave them railway gintilmen alone. And remember, Mary Mouncey, that there's a faithful buoy and a milk walk waiting for ye at home."

"Don't be so silly now, Mrs. O'Rooney," I heard Mouncey say indignantly. "I wasn't doing anything with my eyes."

"Well then, just don't take my warning in ill part," replied the unabashed Nanna. "And as for you, young man," she remarked in a higher tone of shrill disapproval, "jest ye lay a finger on me blessed babe, and, by St. Pathrick, I'll trounce ye till ye don't know whether ye stand on yer head or yer heels, or whether ye was born yesterday or to-morrow."

"It seems to me," I remarked to my wife, "that if we get out of this country without Nanna falling foul of somebody, we may consider ourselves lucky people."

CHAPTER IX.

BILLY SHERRINGHAM.

I DON'T think that I know of any charm like that of settling down in a new place. Everything is fresh, even the inconveniences; and, personally, I have that kind of disposition which would rather put up with a new inconvenience than go on for ever in the stodgy atmosphere of an unchanging luxury.

We were received by the smiling *propriétaire* of the dainty little house in the Faubourg, having been conveyed from the boat in a couple of small open carriages drawn by very decent horses. During the years that the estimable Potter has lived with us, I have always been troubled with an uneasy feeling that she has never looked upon us as sane and ordinary people living the ordinary workaday life which is the lot of most of us. There has always lurked in my mind a suspicion that Potter regarded us as a couple of children playing

at being grown up. That first day in the little house in the Faubourg convinced me beyond all doubt that such was the case. She looked round the little entrance hall as she might have looked round if she had suddenly found herself compressed into a doll's house.

"Isn't it a dear little place, Potter?" said my wife. "See, this is the dining-room, very tiny, but so dainty and pretty."

"Very small, m'm," remarked Potter, in an acid tone. Potter is a good soul, but distinctly inclined to acidity. "You'll not be able to seat more than six at the outside, m'm."

"We sha'n't want to seat more than six, Potter," said Nell gently.

"I was thinking of Major and Mrs. Dare and the family, m'm," said Potter rebukingly. "But it won't take a deal of keeping clean. Is that the drawing-room, m'm?"

"Yes, this is the drawing-room," said Nell.

She opened the door which led from the drawing-room to the dining-room, and passed into the dainty room with its cheerful white-draped windows, its well-polished floor, and curious little mats set in front of each individual chair. At this moment Mouncey appeared at the door.

"Oh, please, m'm, would you come here a minute," she asked. There was a suppressed eagerness in her tone which told me that she was as pleased with her new surroundings as a child is with a new toy.

My wife went quickly out, leaving Potter standing looking desolately round the room.

"You don't like fresh places, Potter?" I said.

She looked up at me with a sort of relief in her austere eyes.

"No, sir, I don't," she said, with that downright air which makes Potter so exceptionally valuable to me. "By the time I have got thoroughly to understand this little place, and have managed to get everything just to my hand, we shall be going back again."

"Ah, well, well, it's all in the day's work, Potter," I replied. "After all, there is something in that. You will be able the better to appreciate your own place when we go home again; and, meantime, you can't be the worse for a complete change."

Potter still looked very disconsolate.

"So people say, sir," she remarked with a superior air. "But I never could see the necessity or the benefit of so much change myself. I'm sure, sir, when you and the mistress come back again

after being away, your first remark is always the same : 'Oh, it is so nice to be at home again !' It makes me wonder why you ever want to go away at all."

"But, Potter," I said, "you wouldn't like to stay in Victoria Street in August?"

"Oh, I don't know, sir," she replied. "I can't see what Victoria Street ails now or at any other time. I'm sure, when you were away last summer, and I went down to the country to stay with my mother, I was wishing myself back in Victoria Street all the time."

"You don't mean it, Potter!"

"Yes, sir, I was. I never got a wink of sleep at all the first week."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, there was a corncrake all night, and the cocks began crowing about two in the morning. Mother told me the first night to get to bed early and have a good night's rest, because it would be such a treat to me after noisy London. Why, sir, I never closed my eyes, and I never knew what a good night's rest was till I got back to Victoria Street again!"

"Well, you certainly won't have a corncrake here, Potter, and we are not near enough to the

sea for that to keep you awake, and probably the only thing that will disturb you will be the bugles up at the castle, though whether you can hear them much down here, I don't know."

"I'm sure I hope not, sir," she replied in a melancholy tone of resignation.

But Potter was not one to stay talking idly even to me. She went out of the room with an air which was a distinct rebuke to me for having wasted her time in useless discussion, and I strode to the open widow, where I stood with my hands in my pockets looking out on the broad, white road.

How curious the differences in human characters are! I remember I was a little chap of about nine or ten years old, when the first idea of removal—the complete upheaval of a household—came into my own life. It was not our own establishment—no, but the outgoing of our next-door neighbour for another domicile, neither so commodious nor so picturesque as the one in which they had been living. It was certainly in a more expensive locality, being in a main street of the old city of Blankhampton, whereas their birthplace and mine both stood in a narrow lane with which they were utterly out of keeping. They rejoiced exceedingly

over the move, and being very near, the boys of the family, with help which I freely and ungrudgingly gave, did a good deal of what might be called light porterage. I regarded my greatest friends with respect and reverence while their move was going on—as people who were having a new experience, as people who lived! I had not learned the misery of house-moving at that time of day, but it is a lesson which I have acquired very thoroughly since. Then, eating your dinner off a shelf in the pantry was a joy—I always object to it now, and insist upon going to the nearest restaurant.

I wonder if the French *ouvrier* is as truly upsetting and tiresome as the average British workman? The average British workman, particularly when he is in the way of furniture removing, is a very aggravating animal. Well do I remember one move that my people made which supplied us with a household word for as long as my father and mother lived. The man who put us to rights had a very limited vocabulary, and a more limited intellect. He, having seen the furniture safely transferred from one house to another, remained to see the carpets being laid, to put the finishing touches, hang up

pictures, and such like. He had only one phrase at his command—that phrase was “Take and put,” and “put” was pronounced in the same manner as the golfing expression. He was singularly devoid of intelligence. My mother arranged all the drawing-room pictures in order as she wanted them to be hung.

“Don’t you think, ma’am,” said Richard—his name was Richard—“that it would be better if I was to take and put this large picture in the recess?”

“No, I want it put where it is.”

“Then would you rather that I’d take and put it here?” was his next inquiry.

“I would rather that you would take and put it exactly where I have set it against the wall. If you will take and put the nails in, I will come and tell you exactly where I wish the pictures to go.”

“Very good, ma’am.”

So Richard went on hammering nails in below the cornice, and then my mother was fetched to give her opinion as to the most desirable height to hang each picture.

Told, I am aware that the story sounds little; endured, it produced a concentrated amount of

aggravation and irritation not to be realised except by those who were present at the time.

I remember my mother saying that Richard, if he lacked intelligence and the ordinary vocabulary of the average British workman, certainly was compensated in both those deficiencies by an amount of ingenuity which, directed into proper channels, should have made him a prime minister, for it was little short of marvellous to note how many times he was able to bring in his favourite phrase. It mattered little what the subject in question was—the hanging of a picture, the laying of a carpet, the placing of a table against a wall, nay, it even entered into the eating of his dinner, for Richard was a first-class workman, who liked to finish a job when he had once begun it, and disdained to leave his post for such frivolous considerations as meals.

“Johnnie,” said my mother to me confidentially, “just run into the kitchen, dear, and see that cook is giving Richard his dinner comfortably.”

I did run into the kitchen. I was at the age when small boys do run in preference to walking, and, as I crossed the threshold, I heard cook say rather sharply to the visitor:

“Now, Mr. Richard, your dinner is all ready.”

"Thank you, miss," said Richard, in his most civil tone. "Shall I take and put my chair on this side of the table, or shall I take and put my chair next to Sarah?"

"Lor'," answered the cook sharply, "you can take and put yourself to Timbuctoo, if you like."

Just then Nell came back again.

"It is a dear little house, Jack," she said enthusiastically, "everything is so clean and spick and span. Nanna is delighted with her rooms, and Mouncey says it will be a perfect treat living in that dear little kitchen looking out all day upon the roses."

"H'm!" I remarked drily, "I wonder how long Mouncey will be content to look out on the roses? Looking out on the scarlet runners up at the Castle is more Mouncey's form, I should think."

"Oh, well," said Nell easily, "Mouncey is very proud and very pretty. If the soldiers do run after her, it won't do anybody any harm; and, of course, you know, dear, they won't any of them be able to talk English."

I said nothing. I forebore to remind my wife that the conscription takes all classes, all sorts and conditions of men, all degrees of education; but I said to myself that if I was doing my

enforced term of soldiering, and discovered a Mouncey close at hand, it would not matter whether she spoke English or French, Chinese or Choctaw-Indian, whether she was a cook or a demoiselle, I would contrive somehow to have my innings.

"Have a cup of tea?" Nell said. "I am sure you must want it."

I was just about to turn from the window when a figure, passing by on the other side, struck me as being exceedingly familiar."

"My goodness, Nell," I exclaimed, "surely that is Billy Sherringham?"

CHAPTER X

OLD FRIENDS IN NEED.

"It is Billy Sherringham," said Nell, running to the window. "Call him, Jack."

I gave vent to a tremendous "Hi!" but Billy Sherringham took no more notice than if a dog had barked.

"Billy! Billy!" I called out.

At the sound of his own name thus familiarly uttered, he turned and looked stonily in the opposite direction to our little domicile. I thrust my head and shoulders out of the window, and waved my handkerchief.

"This way, Billy, just across the road, old chap."

He realised my whereabouts with a start—an elaborate start—and came delicately across the dusty road towards me.

"My goodness, Winter, you don't mean to say that's you! What are you doing in Dieppe? Why, Mrs. Winter, how are you?"

"How do you do, Sir William," said Mrs. Winter pleasantly. "What are *you* doing in Dieppe?"

"I have come for the benefit of my health, Mrs. Winter. I have not been at all well lately, in fact, I have been out of sorts for some time; and they tell me the air of Dieppe is exceedingly good. By the bye, of course you know that Edward Sinclair is here?"

"Oh, yes; are you staying with him? I saw him last week when we came over to take a house."

"No, I am not staying with him, though I have been about with him a bit. I am staying at the Hotel Royal."

"Are you going to stay long?"

"Some little time."

"Do come in," said Nell; "we are just going to have tea. We have only arrived by the boat this afternoon."

"Really! Yes, thanks, I will have a cup of tea—you make such awfully good tea, Mrs. Winter."

"Yes, I do have good tea," said Nell, with modest self-appreciation.

"And how is dear Mrs. Poplin-Browne? I haven't seen her for weeks," I declared.

"Mrs. Poplin-Browne? Oh, she is very well—that is, she is—she is—the fact is, she is here, too."

"In Dieppe? You don't say so! Oh, what a good time we are going to have to be sure. You do surprise me! All the world seems to be coming to Dieppe this year. How nice it will be. I do like a place where one finds plenty of one's friends. And do give me her address."

"Mrs. Poplin-Browne has a flat in the Rue du Haut Pas," replied Sir William, in a tone which implied that he had come by the information purely as a matter of accident.

"And she has those dear children with her?" Nell asked.

"Yes, yes; they are both here. They are a great success. They come to the Thursday dances—there is a children's dance every Thursday afternoon, you know, Mrs. Winter, at the Casino—and they are a great success; everybody wants to dance with them. They've picked up a word or two of French, and, upon my word, they are irresistible, they really are."

"They must be getting great girls now?"

"Ah, yes," said Sir William; "I think Alix was twelve the other day. She is a great chum of

mine; I always take her to buy her birthday present herself."

"And then do you leave out the other one?" asked Nell rather indignantly.

"Leave out Ethel? Oh, no, Mrs. Winter, nobody will ever leave out Ethel; Ethel looks after that. I also take Ethel to buy her birthday present, and I suppose, when the time comes for them to be married, I shall take them to buy their wedding presents. They talk about it quite calmly—they are quite unblushing about it."

"They are dear children," said Nell. "And what is so delightful is that my sister and her husband are coming over here for three months, and are bringing their family. They are charming children also. Did you ever meet my sister's children?"

"Your sister's children? yes, I think so. Let me see, you used to call one Phyl—she was a charming child—there was a great air of distinction about her."

"That's her," I said promptly, with a full stop.

It is astonishing how you find men—aye, and women, too—out when you come to talk children to them. Children are very wonderful quantities.

Children are to the rest of humanity what *aqua fortis* is to gold and base metal. I had never thought much of Billy Sherringham; a rich, selfish, swaggering, well-born, idle man about town—that had been my estimate of him; too selfish to be vicious—which is naturally the acme of selfishness. And yet, test Billy Sherringham's well-bred, highly-veneered corslet of selfishness, so polished as to be as *Vernis Martin* among common varnishes, and one discovers that there is some good in the man after all, that there is a heart and a kindly human sympathy under all the "haw-haws," "reallys," and "don'tcherknows," which constitute his ordinary society vocabulary.

When he had taken leave of us, we stood at the window watching his well-preserved figure, faultlessly dressed in smart, light grey garments, surmounted by a Homburg hat to match them in tint, go leisurely down the street.

"He isn't half bad," said Nell. "In spite of all his side and deliberate dandyism, I like Sir William," she said. "By the bye, I wonder if Mr. Poplin-Browne is here?"

"Not as Billy Sherringham is," I said unhesitatingly. "However, we are pretty sure to see her in the Casino this evening, unless Billy Sherring-

ham has taken it into his head that the Casino is not *chic*."

We did meet Mrs. Poplin-Browne in the Casino that evening, and my instant thought was that never, in all this wide world, had any woman so done credit to her trainer.

From time immemorial Mrs. Poplin-Browne had been socially ambitious. Her instincts were good, but her circumstances were unfortunate. No one had ever impugned her virtue; although an attractive woman with a devoted friend of a station higher than her own in the person of Sir William Sherringham, she had walked with such care that, like Cæsar's wife, she was above suspicion.

"Dear Mrs. Winter!" she exclaimed to Nell, in accents which were an improvement upon Billy Sherringham's. "What joy to find that you two are in Dieppe. It is a dear little place—so clean and primitive. I am enjoying myself here amazingly. And Mr. Winter, too; so pleased to see you again. And have you seen anything of dear Audrey d'Ecie lately?"

I replied to her that I had seen Lady d'Ecie a few days before leaving London—that, in fact, I had taken her in to dinner, and that she had told

me she was on the point of leaving England for a trip on the Continent.

"Ah, yes, they have gone to Aix. A little early, oh, a little early, but her doctor was imperative. They have done so much this season; they are so enormously popular. They are coming back this way, so as to stay a few days with me. I don't mean in my little *appartement*; it is tiny, tiny; but they will stay at an hotel near so as to be with me. Of course, I am looking forward to it heart and soul."

I replied with my best and most gallant manner, that I was quite sure that Lady d'Ecie was looking forward to it the most of the two.

"Ah, yes; you know," said she, looking at me with a sentimental expression in her handsome eyes; "you know all that dear Audrey and I are to each other."¹

"I know all that you were to Lady d'Ecie; I know that but for you she would never have become Viscountess d'Ecie," I said blandly.

Mrs. Poplin-Browne gave a sigh of intense satisfaction.

"Ah, Mr. Winter," she murmured, "it is not often in this world that things come out quite right.

¹ See "My Geoff."

If ever a girl deserved her good fortune it was dear Audrey—so good—so charming, so true—so brave. It is not always that virtue meets with its proper reward as it did in her case."

"And the young lady you have with you now?" I asked—perhaps a little by way of drawing her out—"is she likely to reflect as much credit upon you?"

"My dear sir—good goodness no! She is most kind, most sweet, most trustworthy, but not attractive—no, *not* attractive, and not at all likely to set the Thames on fire. She is going to be married sometime this autumn; she has really only come over because I wanted to give my servants a holiday, otherwise she would have gone straight home."

"And to whom is she going to be married?"

"Oh, to a very worthy young man—something in a bank—a very ordinary, commonplace, suitable sort of a person. I am thinking of replacing her with somebody French—such an advantage for children to acquire French early."

Within the last year or so I have become more deeply interested in educational matters than ever I have been in my life before.

"I suppose my old friends, Alix and Ethel, are grown out of all recognition?" I said.

"Not at all," replied Mrs. Poplin-Browne; "they are distinguées, handsome children; very good, very sweet, but quite babies still. By the bye, I suppose you know that I am godmother to Audrey d'Ecie's little heir?"

"Oh, yes, I had already heard of it."

"Now, who told you?" she inquired.

"Lady d'Ecie told me herself. You and Mrs. Clement Warrington the godmothers, Lord Tremaine and the Duke of Banbury the godfathers!"

"That is so," she said. "And do you know, Mr. Winter," she went on, dropping her voice to a very confidential tone, "I was never so angry with Tom in my life as when I got dear Audrey's letter asking me if I would accept the office."

"And why?"

"Well, you know what a keen sense of fun he has? My dear sir, he sat down and laughed till he was almost beside himself. But Mr. Poplin-Browne is very generous. He teased me a great deal about it—in fact, he seemed as if he could not leave the subject alone; and yet he was so good. He took me to the City, and he made me choose a great silver tankard, that even the Duke himself might have given."

For my own part I saw nothing particular to

laugh at. Doubtless, Mrs. Poplin-Browne's husband, bearing in mind how good his wife had been to the lady who is now the Viscountess d'Ecie, would have felt considerably nettled had she ignored all those past benefits and acts of kindness and had quietly gone back to her own sphere of life without any recognition to those who had befriended her in her day of trial. It is easy to laugh, it is very good not to be puffed up and proud; but I doubt me that Thomas Poplin-Browne, of Rosediamond Road, West Kensington, merchant, of the City of London, would have felt bitterly aggrieved had Lord and Lady d'Ecie acted otherwise. As I said a moment ago, it is bad to be puffed up with pride, but ingratitude is loathly; and, although it is indisputably true that it is more blessed to give than to receive, yet I do not believe that there exists any man or woman in this world who does not like to feel that those whom they have befriended hold them in everlasting remembrance and gratitude.

But perhaps the bluff Thomas was tickled at the suggestion that there could be any need to ask his spouse whether she would "accept the office" or not. He knew his Sally!

CHAPTER XI.

THE WHEAT AND THE CHAFF.

NELL has always stoutly maintained, and I must say that I think she is perfectly right in her assertion, that Mrs. Poplin-Browne understands the value of money better than any human being she has ever known.

Early the following morning I took her down as far as the address in the Rue du Haut Pas which Mrs. Poplin-Browne had given us, that lady having kindly volunteered to assist my wife in her search for an abiding place for Major and Mrs. Dare.

"You see," she explained, when we were shown into her smart little drawing-room, "Tom had to go to America again. It is really most tiresome, but business is business and must be thought of. Then I determined to go to Dieppe. I am so tired of the endless round of seaside places in England, and, besides that, the girls are getting big now, and it is very hard for children to grow up with

narrow, unenlightened minds, and to mix with all sorts of people, as you cannot help children doing at the seaside."

"And are there not all sorts here?" I inquired.

"Well, yes, I suppose there are, but then they are French all sorts, and that makes such a difference! So then I came over here. I had an idea that I could take lodgings just as if I were in England, but I found that I was utterly mistaken, for lodgings, in our sense of the word, are not to be had; and so, as I should not care to have my two girls at an hotel, I looked out for a tiny, tiny flat, which I have taken for the season."

"And how long is the season?" asked Nell.
"Don't they let except for the season?"

"No, I think not. You may take it for a long or a short term, but you take it in the lump, so to speak. This is quite cheap—considering the situation."

I walked up the street with the two ladies, leaving them at the entrance to the *Maison Moitte*. I lingered long enough to see them taken in charge by a big, smooth-haired dog and an apple-cheeked old lady. Then I hied myself to the blessed Casino, where I glanced over the papers and arranged for a course of baths. I found the

terrace thronged with gaily-dressed ladies, sitting about under the awning, working, reading, chatting, or watching the bathers as they emerged, draped in various coloured *peignoirs*, from the little bathing boxes standing in rows just below the wall.

I noticed that the *chic* thing for ladies was to bathe in costumes, black knickerbockers and tunic, black silk stockings and sand shoes, a broad red sash tied round the waist, and on the head a smart black cap covering the whole of the hair, and tied round with a broad red ribbon with a huge coquettish bow at the top. It was great fun seeing the bathers go down in couples along the line of planks down the Estacade which stretches far out into the water, and to see them, men and women alike, tumble over head first into the deep water. Apparently they considered the bathing dangerous at this point, for although the sky was cloudless and sunny, and the sea calm and still, there were a couple of boats cruising about outside the two bathing places, in evident readiness for any emergency that might arise. I found out afterwards that the bathing at Dieppe is not a little tricky at certain stages of the tide, because of the sudden shelving of the shingly beach, so

that one moment the bather is walking on level ground, while the next he may find himself stepping clean out of his depth. I was still watching the busy scene when somebody touched me on the shoulder.

"Hullo, old chap ; not going to bathe this morning ?" said a voice.

I looked up and beheld Edward Sinclair standing beside me, a broad grin on his good-looking face.

"Well," I answered, "I was thinking about it."

"Then I recommend you not to think any more, but to come. I am going to bathe now, do you come along with me."

I rose from my chair, nothing loth.

"We shall just be in time to see Miss Barclay take her header off the end of the Estacade."

"Is there anything wonderful about her ?" I asked.

"Well, there is rather, because she bathes in a man's rig-out instead of the usual get-up."

"How do you mean ?"

"In striped tights."

"You don't mean it !"

"But I do."

"Is she English ?"

"Very much so. She is young and pretty, and the chief occupation of a morning among a certain class of men is to try and get a snap-shot of Miss Barclay as she comes along the Estacade. You've got your tickets, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then be as quick as you can, old chap, because every moment we waste now will spoil our bathe."

I enjoyed my swim amazingly, and then Sinclair and I went into the Casino and had a peg. I don't know that, left to myself, I should have indulged so far, but Sinclair is one of those fellows who wants a peg on all and every occasion. Not that he drinks—I never saw Sinclair the worse for drink in my life—but he is possessed of an unsatiable thirst, and, as he explained to me that morning, bathing always seems to increase it. If I were Sinclair I would not bathe at all; but, after all, it is his business, not mine, and so I enjoyed my peg—which Sinclair paid for, by the bye—with a fairly easy conscience, and then we lounged out on to the terrace again.

We had not been out for more than three minutes when I heard a vigorous exclamation from Sinclair. It would have sounded all right in French, but in English it was a little forcible.

"What is it, old chap?" I inquired.

"Oh, there's that woman! Come along—don't look—don't turn your head! I can't be seen tramping at her chariot wheels, and besides, she'll land me for a trip on the yacht, or something; she is capable of any enormity."

I did turn my head; in fact I had already turned it when Sinclair had uttered the warning. What I saw was "Dear Mrs. Archie Cavan" bearing down the Terrace walk in full sail, and with her my Lady of Drumdry. In attendance were several very young men—mere boys. Oswald Manning, who has written some fairly clever bits of cheap second-rate philosophy and gives himself the airs of a great authority in consequence, was one of them. There was a very young novelist, whose work is ticketed "*Not for the girl of sixteen*"; an equally youthful artist, whose principal fancy is three-cornered ladies, hideous specimens, something between modern Japanese art and the early English nursery period. They were all faultlessly dressed, all wore fresh and exquisite buttonholes, and all seemed profoundly satisfied with themselves and the company that they were in. Contentment is a beautiful quality, but sometimes it provokes a wonder which is infinite.

As this group passed on, the ever-shifting kaleidoscope of humanity turned to our view a different picture.

"That is a very pretty girl, Sinclair," I said, as three charming young women passed us.

"Ah, yes, those girls are pretty; they are the best-dressed women here—the Demoiselles Marcelle. They are Parisians, of course—Parisian of the Parisian. There is a new way of doing the hair this season, fluffing it out and bunching it round the head. I don't like it. They are very smart, very *chic*, these French girls; beautifully turned out—some of them—as faultless in detail as a fashion-plate, and mostly as vapid; but for looks and style commend me to a real English tailor-made woman. But mind you," he added warningly, "it takes an English figure to wear an English gown. French women have smaller waists, and, as a rule, more bust than ours; they are bulgier about the hips too, and very neat as to the feet; but they have no roses in their cheeks, no spring in their step, nothing of what we most pride ourselves on at home. Do you know," he said, looking reflectively after the charming figures of the Demoiselles Marcelle, "that a French girl of any position, from her cradle to her marriage

positively does not know the luxury of ever being alone? She is never alone. She sleeps in a room opening out of her mother's, and she is not even allowed to turn the key in the door; she is watched to an extent which would drive our daughters into mutiny. Even here, in this little, quiet, seaside place, no French girl is allowed so much as to cross the road by herself; she must either have an elder member of her family or a maid with her. It is the same all the country over; little girls and big girls going to and from school must be fetched by a maid, even though their mother may be serving in a shop, and that not a very big one, just down the street. If you are presented to a French girl in the Casino and you ask her to dance, it is her mother who will answer you. The average French girl has no opinions; she is not allowed to have them. She may not drink wine without water; she bears always in mind that little girls should be seen and not heard; her conversational powers consist of 'Oui, Maman,' and 'Non, Maman.' When she is a school-girl she cries if she falls down, or if the good sister in whose class she is studying rebukes her for some faults. When she is grown up she is exactly like every other French girl, as if they

were peas out of the same pod, or jellies turned out of the same mould. She dances beautifully, sings a little, and plays less. If she is by way of being very English she plays tennis, and then madame will warn her in a loud whisper not to overheat herself, and she says 'Non, Maman,' very obediently, and lets her partner take all the balls. She is mostly frozen in masculine society, but she giggles a good deal with her girl friends, to whom she gives her left hand as a mark of her special regard. She marries whither her mother has directed her matrimonial endeavours. And after that," said Sinclair, waxing enthusiastic over his subject—"after that, my dear chap, in three weeks—or three months—she has bloomed out into the most brilliant, the most knowing, and the most *chic* little person that you can find anywhere on the face of the habitable globe. She takes to the world and to her own way like a duck takes to water. She is a fearful and wonderful creation, the real French woman."

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMING OF THE DARES.

WHEN Nell came in to *déjeuner* she was radiant.

"Really, Jack," she said, "I must say that I have succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. I have taken the big flat in the Maison Moitte, and I am sure that Nannie will be most pleased and satisfied with it. Such nice rooms and so well furnished, close to the Casino, and with an entrance on to the Plage. Nothing could be better."

"That is the place belonging to the Hotel Royal?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Oh, it is such a curious old place, Jack, with an historical house. It was the hotel of the Duchesse de Berri, who brought her little child here in 1827, and so made Dieppe the fashion. There is an inscription on the step at the principal entrance, with the date and the word 'Mademoiselle.' This is the touching little inscription, '*Son premier pas est pour Dieppe et pour Dieppe un bienfait.*'"

"Then it is a flat?" I inquired.

"Well, dear, not exactly a flat—an *appartement*. There are two very large sitting-rooms, two halls, and two kitchens on the ground floor, and on the first floor there are—let me see—five, six, seven, eight rooms."

"Won't that be too large for them?"

"Oh, I don't think so, because Nannie particularly told me she did not wish to be cramped. You see it is as great a holiday to them to be in a house with plenty of room after Aldershot as it is for us to be in this little bijou residence. I am sure," she went on, lowering her voice, and looking to see that the door was shut, "I am sure, Jack, that Potter thinks we are playing at being married—you and I, playing at housekeeping, playing at living."

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh, her manner, everything about her. All last night and this morning she was quite indulgent to me."

"All right, my dear, let her go on being indulgent. I wonder," I continued, "whether she is indulgent to Mouncey when she plays at being in love with somebody? I wonder, when Mouncey picks up a soldier, or a gendarme, or an agent of police, or a

milkman, or some other masculine thing, I wonder whether the estimable Potter will be indulgent to her then ? There's no knowing. By the bye, did you see any other flats ? ”

“ Oh, yes ; we did not decide off-hand. We went to see Madame la Propriétaire at the hotel and heard the rent, and then we went on a regular pilgrimage. I enjoyed myself immensely,” said Nell.

“ In fact, you almost wished you were hunting for yourself ? ”

“ Oh, no, for I like this better than any other place in the town for myself. But my being satisfied does not prevent my taking a pleasure in looking out for other people. All the others that we saw, I didn't think were nearly such good value for the money, nor so conveniently placed. It is true that we saw several with a sea view, but I didn't like them nearly so well. There is a tranquillity and a retirement about the stately old house in its grey old courtyard, which, I think, will suit Nannie perfectly after the drawbacks of camp life. At all events, I have done the deed, and have taken the *appartement* for twelve months.”

“ For what ? ” I exclaimed incredulously.

“ For twelve months, dear. It is the same price

to take it for twelve months as for the season, and if Bob is not better, and has to have his leave extended, they may as well stay there as anywhere else, or we might perhaps take it on."

"Little woman," I said, "you and Nannie have got some scheme of your own on that I know nothing about."

"Oh, Jack dear, how sharp you are! Now, what put that into your head?"

"You put it into my head; I can see it in your eyes, see it in your manner, hear it in your voice. Why," I said scornfully, "you couldn't keep anything from me if your very soul depended on it."

"Well, really, dear, Nannie and I have got a little scheme on. You see, Bob Dare has six months' leave to begin with, and Nannie does not mean Phyl and Cis to be idle all that time."

"Naturally not."

"Of course Jackie will only be here for his holidays, but he may as well come here as go to Aldershot or anywhere else, and Nannie means to send Phyl and Cis to the convent so as to perfect their French; and I think she had an idea that if she was *obliged* to go back again with Bob at the end of six months, that you and I would, perhaps,

take their place and make a home for them, don't you know, darling."

I sat and looked at my wife in amazement; then I planted my elbows firmly on the table, and I said:

"Mrs. John Strange Winter, have you, may I ask, come here with the deliberate intention of remaining twelve months?"

"Well, dear, not exactly that; but if you like Dieppe, and didn't mind staying, of course it would be delightful for me to be six months with Nannie again; and we might just as well stay here the whole year—it wouldn't cost any more than going back and living at home, and not quite so much, because, you see, we should save in clothing and wear and tear of our own things, and entertaining. I don't think it's a bad idea, Jack."

Perhaps it wasn't—perhaps it was. It was her idea, and I knew that I should have to accommodate myself to it sooner or later!

"And then, I suppose, when we have finished Phyl's education, we shall have to go back to London for the purpose of bringing her out?"

"Oh, that is looking rather far ahead, dear boy, isn't it?" said Nell very sweetly. "And even if we do, you know, Jack, you are so fond of Phyl, you wouldn't mind, would you?"

Seriously I don't think that I should. I pretend sometimes to Nell that I do mind certain projects, that I mind them very much; but it is only by way of protesting for my liberty, for my own will, for my manliness, my own individuality, so to speak. Personally, there is nothing that I would not do for any one of Nannie Dare's children, and, of them all, it is Phyllis that has the warmest and most precious place in my heart.

To me it is ever a matter for wonder that Phyllis should be grown up; it is one of the circumstances of life to which I have not yet accommodated myself, to which I have not become accustomed. To think of Phyl being turned seventeen! Why some girls are married as early as that! As for bringing her out, the child is so pretty—that is, unless she has altered very much during the last few months—that her coming out will be no great burden to anybody, excepting in the cost of her few frocks and such like.

The Dare family arrived just a week later. As I said a moment ago, I had not seen Phyllis for some months, not since she was a tall, rather gawky, young person with a mane of bright hair hanging down her back, and petticoats that were evidently outgrown. The Phyl who arrived by

the good ship *Sussex* fairly took my breath away.

"This is not Phyl," I said, looking her up and down.

"Yes, Jack, it is," she declared, in her fresh, young voice. "It is the same old Phyl, with her hair up and a long frock—quite a young lady, dear. To tell you the honest truth," she went on, linking her arm in mine with just the same winning, confidential air which had distinguished her when she was a wise little slip of nine, "to tell you the truth, dear Jack, I have hardly got used to them myself yet, for I only had them new to come here with. Mother looked at me when it was decided we were coming, and she said, 'Really, Phyl, I can't let you go to a fashionable watering-place looking like a gawky school-girl, all arms and legs; I shall take you to my tailor's, and let him make you a couple of proper gowns. You are taller than I am, and it is quite time that you left off being a baby.' Exactly," Phyl went on, "as if I *wanted* to have skirts half way up my legs and a pigtail down my back! As I said to Mother, it was so unreasonable of her to put it that way! However, I went to Mother's tailor, and I have had three new frocks, Jack; I have, indeed! This is the most ordinary of any of them!"

"Then you must look an awful swell in the others, Phyl," I said, glancing up and down her slim, gracious figure. "But you know, dear child, you mustn't get too grown up; I can't lose my old friend altogether in a young lady with her hair coiled up in that dignified fashion and long skirts and so on!"

"My dear Jack," said Phyl, in just her old protective and dignified tone, "just you invite me to go and have ices and chocolates and a few things of that kind, and you'll see how much of the old Phyl is left!"

I had always thought of Phyllis Dare as an extremely pretty child; but even my partial eyes had not seen in her childish prettiness the promise of such beauty as is hers to-day. Somehow she makes me think of so many beautiful and gracious things that she is a perfect vocabulary of suggestion. First she made me think of a willow wand, slight, elegant, supple, and fresh; then of a wild rose, as I noted the soft yet brilliant bloom upon her round young cheeks; then of dew-laden violets, as my eyes met the full glance of hers, for surely there never were such a pair of eyes as Phyl's, and they have a way of looking out from under their darker fringes which makes one think of a violet

looking out from the shelter of its cool green leaves.

I was roused from my admiring contemplation of Phyl by Major Dare coming across the Douane to speak to me.

"Old chap," he said, "will there be any fuss getting through this Custom House business?"

"Have you brought anything contraband?" I asked in return.

"I don't know; I don't know what is contraband."

"Well, my dear chap, have you got any matches?"

"Yes, I have a box in my pocket."

"Then chuck 'em over the side of the quay at once. They'll cost you a fiver if you take them in there."

"Why? Do you mean to say they don't even allow you to take a match for your own use?"

"Not in France. Matches are a Government industry, my dear chap, and the fine for attempting to take any matches through the Custom House is a franc apiece."

"A franc a match! My dear fellow!"

"Quite true! They don't, as a rule, trouble to

count the box ; but they charge you a fiver. It isn't worth it."

"Oh, by Jove, no !"

And my brother-in-law sent his box of wax vestas flying over the quay into the water.

"Got any tobacco ?"

"I am forbidden to smoke. I may only have a mild Turkish cigarette after meals, so I didn't bring any."

"Well, that's lucky, because they object to tobacco being brought in. Have you brought any sugar ?"

"Sugar ! My dear Jack, what are you thinking about ?"

"Oh, you haven't. Have you got any provisions with you ?"

"Provisions ? No."

"Oh, then, I think you may safely say you've got nothing contraband, and, if you don't look too guilty, they'll probably whitewash you without any further ado."

CHAPTER XIII.

A GROWN-UP YOUNG LADY.

THERE is something very inconsistent about people who go away for holidays. Nine people out of ten, when they plan a holiday trip, will hit upon a place because there is not likely to be anyone they know going to it. Breaking fresh ground they call it; untrodden paths; off the beaten track; far from the maddening crowd, and many other phrases aptly describing the longing of the average human soul for some kind of apartness, some form of retreat. Then, having made their arrangements, and shaken the dust of their regular life off their feet, carefully leaving no trace behind by which they may be found, the average holiday-makers proceed instantly to form a new circle of acquaintance, or, if not wholly new, at least to gather together all the old ones whom they may chance to meet during their wanderings, and who have set off from England presumably fired by

similar ambitions to their own. I remember a man once describing how he had spent a summer in Switzerland.

"The people were quite charming," he said, "I never met so many charming people in my life; and I remember it was great fun when we were leaving Thüngerwald, we would not tell the others where we were going. They tried by every means in their power to make out our destination; but we only booked to the next station, and got out and re-registered our luggage so as to carry it on ahead."

"But why," asked a girl, who was listening to this narration, "why should you not have told the people where you were going?"

"Because we did not want them to know."

"But you liked them?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you did not want to get rid of them?"

"Oh, no, certainly not."

"Then why did you keep your destination a secret?"

"Why? Oh, we thought that it was fun, and we thought it a good thing to have a change—a change of party."

"I call it very extraordinary," said the girl.

‘If I meet people while I am away, and if I like them, and I get on with them, and they make nice excursions with me, I don’t see any fun in trying to give them the slip.’

“Yes; but we were keeping them on tenter-hooks to know where we were going,” said the man; “and what is more, they never found out, for we ran across them in Paris on our way home, and even then we would not tell them where we had been.”

“And where had you been?” asked the girl.

“Oh, at a little place up in the Ticini Valley—a sweet little place. We stayed there three weeks.”

“I cannot understand it,” said the girl.

Yet most people, I think, will understand the man’s attitude very well. Those who come to Dieppe, however, seem to be frankly free from this particular taint. It is just as well, for it is a little place where everybody meets everybody else, morning, noon, and night. It is a place where it is not the least use trying to be exclusive, or stuck-up, or anything of that kind. For one thing, it is too near home; for another, the life is too simple.

Life is quite unexciting, during the summer

months, in this charming seaside resort. There are scarcely any "At Home" days, because everybody meets everybody else in the Casino, and, instead of asking your friends to afternoon tea, you take them for a lemon squash, or a sherry-cobbler, or some other out-of-the-way drink, in the great refreshment room at the end of the long corridor leading from the Salle des Petits Chevaux. You may wish to ask your friends, or your friends may wish to ask you, to either of the principal meals—the *déjeuner* or the dinner. But it is no trouble; the feast is given at one of the hotels, or in the dining-room of the Casino, where you can get dinners of the best—and worst—descriptions. No reasonable person would blame the Casino for this last remark. Dine where you will, it depends on the giver of the feast whether the meal is a feast or a fast.

There is a great and fashionable hotel in London—I think that is a near enough indication—where it is the *chic* thing to dine anybody you particularly wish to favour. We will call the hotel for the nonce the "Eclair." I have dined at the "Eclair" to perfection more than once; I have dined there when, with every table filled, we yet had a waiter to each guest, and some big-wig

—the *maitre d'hôtel*, I suppose—coming every now and again to inquire whether we were perfectly satisfied. I have dined there and lunched there when the visitors could have derived no satisfaction from the entertainment, beyond that of being able to say afterwards, "I dined" or "I lunched at the Eclair yesterday." It is not a question of money; it is a question entirely of being "in the know." It is very much the same in the rush of the season at Dieppe, and the obvious moral to be drawn from this is that one must indeed be careful how one chooses one's friends.

I remember once hearing a very quaint remark from a small American woman—young, very pretty, very clever, and decidedly popular. She came to see us one afternoon on my wife's "At Home" day, and as she was leaving rather early, Nell said to her:

"Oh, surely you are not going to run away so soon as this!"

"Why," said she, in her curious American twang, "I must be getting along, for I am dining with Mrs. de Jersey to-night," naming a distinguished novelist noted for the brilliance of her dinners.

"Oh, well, if you are dining with Mrs. de

Jersey," said Nell, "I won't say a word; her dinners are always so charming."

"And the reason why," said the little American woman, "is because she is as particular what she puts on her chairs as what she puts on her dishes."

We gave a dinner to the Dares on the night of their arrival. We dined them all, including the twins. Not at our own bijou residence, which would have been an impossibility, unless some of us had sat upon the floor, which I am afraid would have upset the moral and mental equilibrium of the estimable Potter for good and all. We chose the Hotel de Paris for our little spread, because Nannie Dare thought the children would be too tired to go to the Casino afterwards. The children did not think so; but it was a difference of opinion in which the mothers carried the day.

"Another time we must try the Casino, and have the table in the bow-window," I said to them; "but to-night I am sure the mother is perfectly right, and after you have had a good dinner, the sooner you are tucked up in your little beds the better."

"They are not little beds, Jack," and by the bye, I think I have omitted to mention that

Nannie Dare's children never gave us the solemn prefixes of "Uncle" and "Aunt," and I quite expect that when that baby grows up she will call us Nell and Jack with the same freedom as her cousins !

Our only outside guest was Edward Sinclair. I don't know whether one could call him exactly a guest, because he invited himself. I met him in the street, and he accosted me with :

"By the bye, old chap, did your people come to-day ?"

"They did," I replied, "bag and baggage."

"Has my special friend Phyllis come ?"

"Your special friend Phyllis—what there is left of the old Phyllis—has arrived in Dieppe," I replied.

"What do you mean ?"

"I mean, my dear chap, that the long-legged, sunny-haired child has vanished into thin air, into space, gone. The young lady who came by the *Sussex* to-day was a surprise, a revelation, and a joy to me. She says she is the same Phyl that she always was, and there is a certain little twinkle in her big eyes which gave me the faintest of clues to the child that used to be; otherwise it is a young lady. By Jove, it's lucky that she is

my niece, for I'm sure I should have fallen head over ears in love with her if she hadn't been."

"You don't say so! Do you mean to say that little Phyl is grown up?"

"Very much grown up," I replied. "With her hair up in an arrangement at the top of her head, and a tailor-made frock, and a shirt and a breast-pin!"

"By Jove!" he remarked.

"And a walking-stick," I added.

"A what?"

"A walking-stick—and a bike!"

"Oh, go along!" incredulously.

"Yes."

"And as pretty as she promised to be?" he asked.

"My dear chap, she did promise to be rather pretty."

"Yes, I remember she did."

"She's a beauty, Sinclair. She's the prettiest girl I've seen for—I shouldn't like to say how long—and she doesn't know it."

"Ah, I must go and call on Mrs. Dare. Will they be at the Casino to-night?"

"I think not. They haven't got any tickets for one thing, and Mrs. Dare was particularly anxious

to get the youngsters to bed in good time. They are all dining with me at the Paris."

"At the Paris? Oh, that's a good idea; I'll come too."

He didn't say, "Will you have me?" or "May I come too?" He just said he'd come, and he came.

He arrived the first of them all. We were in the drawing-room, Nell and I, and the Dare family did not join us for at least ten minutes after he had done so. Then they came in a group of five. Old Bob, big, bronzed, soldier all over from the crown of his smooth, well-cropped hair to the soles of his smart, well-varnished boots; Nannie, looking absurdly young to be the mother of anything able to go out to dinner; the twins, a big boy and girl, not conspicuously like each other, but with beautiful manners, and as good-looking as you can expect young things just entering into their teens ever to be; last of all, Phyl, in a light grey gown of severe tailor build, and on her fair head a black hat with pink roses.

"Why, it is Edward Sinclair!" I heard her say, in a surprised tone.

And then I saw him go forward to meet her, both his hands outstretched, his face alight, surprise stamped upon every feature.

"Why, Phyl, Phyl, have you grown up to this?" I heard him say. "Is it possible? Don't say that you are too much of a young lady for me to call you Phyl still!"

"Why, Edward," she replied, with a charming laugh, "what can my growing up have to do with that? Am I to call you 'Mr. Sinclair' because I've got a long frock on? I don't mean to, I can tell you."

I nudged Nell at this point.

"I don't think, my dear," I remarked drily in an undertone, "that we shall need to exile ourselves from London next winter for the sake of chaperoning the young lady to the convent every day."

CHAPTER XIV.

A TELEGRAM.

I THINK I have said before somewhere that Nell is not a particularly good sailor, neither is Mrs. Dare. Old Bob Dare and I like nothing better than a good tossing upon the briny ocean, and those three children of Nannie's might be young fishes for anything they seem to mind when they are once afloat. They can be ill—oh, yes, I've seen them; at least I have seen Phyllis very ill indeed on more than one occasion, but only when it has been intensely rough. In an ordinary way the water has no effect upon her, except it be one of exhilaration and enjoyment.

So it came to pass that we were continually taking little trips on the *Skylark*, for so Edward Sinclair's yacht was called, and our trips consisted always of parts one and two. An elaborate breakfast at twelve o'clock, in which Nannie and Nell joined and heartily enjoyed, then a scurrying on shore of the two ladies, and the remainder of the

afternoon spent on an excursion by the rest of us. The rest of us consisted of myself, Bob Dare and his three children, those two sweet little souls, Alix and Ethel Poplin-Browne, the whole party of youngsters under the chaperonage of Mrs. Poplin-Browne. Perhaps it is not necessary to say that Sir William Sherringham was always in attendance. Sometimes Nell and Nannie Dare drove out to meet us at some particular point, and we all had tea together; but this was not always the order of procedure. What splendid times we had! What dinners we ate when we came in! What treasures we found of one sort and another while we were out!

Dieppe is a little town, but we were never dull. There was always something to do. One of our chief amusements was going down to see the boat come in, but it was seldom that we had time to indulge ourselves in it. There was always something going on! Tennis at the Casino, or an excursion to some country place, most often to the Forêt d'Arques, with a large tea at the Hotel Lecourt at Martin Eglise, from which charming little village we had a pleasant spin home in the cool of the evening, with never a rise in the ground to vex our souls.

I am speaking without the book, but I believe Edward Sinclair undertook to teach Phyl Dare something of botany. At least, whenever we went to the *Forêt*, he and she always used to retire to some mossy bank and explain things to each other. My explanations invariably consisted in elaborate statements to the effect that though galettes are delicious things, if eaten while smoking hot, they are extremely indifferent fare when sodden and cold. I am afraid that I led Nell rather a life while this affair was going on, for she got at last to say, when I even hinted at the existence of a convent, "Really, Jack, you are silly sometimes."

Then about the second week in August something happened—something very sad—for I received a telegram from my old friend Lady d'Ecie. It dated from Paris. "Shocking news," it said. "Grieved to tell you that Mr. Poplin-Browne died yesterday in New York. Servants sent news to me, asking me to break it to my poor dear. Will you do so? I am starting for Dieppe at once to do all that I can for her, but I do not like to leave her in ignorance for a single minute."

I received the telegram just as we had finished *déjeuner*. Nell knew by my face that some untoward news had arrived.

"What is it, Jack?" she asked.

"My dear girl," I replied, "I am afraid that it is dreadful work for you to do."

I let her take the telegram from my hand.

"Oh, poor thing! Oh, Jack, I am sorry! Oh, I must go down to her at once. Do you know what she was doing to-day?"

"No, I have not the least idea."

"I believe she was lunching with Sir William Sherringham somewhere—I must go down at once. You will come with me, Jack?"

I said, of course, that I would go, and together we set out to find the widow who did not know that widowhood had come upon her.

We found, when we reached Mrs. Poplin-Browne's *appartement* in the Rue du Haut Pas, that she was not at home. The maid told us that she believed that she was lunching at the Hotel Royal with Sir William, so to the Hotel Royal we hied ourselves, and there, sure enough, we found them enjoying a *tête-à-tête* lunch under the veranda.

"Are you two going to breakfast here *en tête-à-tête*?" she remarked, as she caught sight of us.

"No, we have had our breakfast, dear Mrs. Poplin-Browne," said Nell, very kindly. "Are you at the end of yours?"

"No; oh, no; just about the middle. Why? Is there anything I can do for you, dear lady?"

"You could do something for me," said Nell, half hesitatingly. "Sir William, I have something important to tell Mrs. Poplin-Browne. Will you excuse me if I take her away?"

He was still standing beside his chair, and he bowed in token of assent—as, indeed, he could not avoid doing—and Nell took hold of the poor woman's arm, and led her gently away in the direction of her own home.

"What is the matter, Winter?" said Billy Sherringham to me. "I am afraid your wife has brought bad news?"

"She has brought the worst news, Sherringham," I answered. "I have just had a telegram from Lady d'Ecie to say that poor Poplin-Browne is dead."

"Good God!" He rapped the words out sharply, and stood staring at me as if unable to credit his own ears. Then he clutched my arm. "You don't mean it?"

"I mean it right enough," I replied. "Here is the telegram; you can see it for yourself."

He almost snatched the paper out of my hand.

"What will happen? It is true," he muttered;

"but what will happen? Will she have to go out there? What will people say? I can't see her through it."

"See her through it?" I said, in an interrogative tone. "What do you mean, Billy?"

"What do I mean? There is a lot before her, a lot of things she must do; she'll have to do them alone—I shall be no use to her—people would say—"

"People would say—people would say what?" I echoed.

"People would say that all had not been right—people would say—oh, a thousand things—that the man had killed himself—all the things that people do say when a woman is in trouble. And I—I am helpless—I cannot do anything."

"Pooh! She has plenty of friends, and the little there is to do they will see her through. What is there for you to do?"

He caught hold of my arm, and clutched it as I should not have thought that Billy Sherringham's fat fingers could clutch anything.

"Man alive! Do you mean to say that you have known me all these years, and have not realised that she is the one woman in the world for me? And yet, feeling that, yet I must stand here and

do nothing—it is the kindest thing that I can do for her. Look here; will you help me in this?"

"My dear chap," I said, "I would do anything for a woman in trouble, but I don't think that either you or I need trouble ourselves. Audrey d'Ecie is on her way here, and probably d'Ecie is with her. In any case she is Mrs. Poplin-Browne's great friend. My wife will stick by her until Audrey d'Ecie comes. After that she will be in good hands. I don't think that you need upset yourself, unless, indeed, Mrs. Poplin-Browne knows of your feeling towards her."

"Knows!" he echoed. "Man alive! Knows—knows what I feel! Why, I wouldn't have dared to tell her. She's not a woman one can say things to as one says them to half the women one knows. She's a straight woman. She wouldn't understand me. She'd have dropped me like a red-hot coal! She liked having me about her because I suited her. I am a smart man about town with a handle to my name, and he—he was a common business man that dropped his aitches, but I shouldn't have dared to suggest that we should swop places with her."

"Then, my dear fellow," I said very quietly, "if

I were you I wouldn't worry. Be gentle and kind to her while she is here; let Audrey d'Ecie and my wife manage everything for her, and time will work the rest."

"I suppose you mean—? I don't know—it has never presented itself to my mind before. I thought the man would outlive me twenty times over. He was a good sort, mind you; plain, rough, unpolished, but hear Audrey d'Ecie talk about him—hear d'Ecie himself—and then you will realise what a shock it is to me to know that he is gone—that he is out of my road." He almost hissed the words at me in his excitement and distress. "Winter," he went on, "don't think me a brute to think of myself at such a moment as this. I am unnerved, unhinged. Here, waiter, waiter—*garçon*—bring me a brandy and soda. Oh, the fool doesn't understand English—*un cognac et un eau de seltz tout de suite*."

I waited until he had drunk it and had pulled himself together a little, then I suggested that we should walk round and see if there was anything that we could do for the widow. He acquiesced, and we went round to the house in the Rue de Haut Pas. Nell met us at the door.

"Oh, Jack, dear," she said, "if you would go and

fetch the two children from the Convent. Don't tell them till you get them home, dear. Poor children—what an ending to their holiday—their first little trip abroad!”

“Is there anything I can do, Mrs. Winter?” Billy Sherringham asked, with an expression quite unlike his usual bored man-about-town air.

“If you would find out what time the train comes in from Paris with Lady d’Ecie, and would go to meet her, that would be really kind of you.”

He turned as if to go, then turned back, opened his mouth twice, but stopped short as if he would not frame the words that he wished to utter. I divined his meaning, and put the question for him.

“How has she taken it?” I asked.

“Oh, dreadfully, dreadfully! She is utterly broken down. Her only wish is to get the children here at once.”

“I will take a carriage for them,” I said.

And Billy Sherringham turned and went up the street by himself.

CHAPTER XV.

A CLIMAX.

I FEEL that it would be out of place in a holiday story to go into further details of the sad news that came to us through Lady d'Ecie. She arrived from Paris late that afternoon, and after staying the night went by the next day's boat to England with the widow and the two dear children. My wife and I both offered to go with her, but, as Lady d'Ecie was there, she would not hear of it.

"And it is not the least necessary," Audrey d'Ecie said, giving one hand to Nell and the other to me; "there is so little to do, poor thing. Geoff and I will go over with her, and remain until she has got everything arranged; then we will take her down to the Towers with us. We have not asked a soul this year, excepting the Clement Warringtons, for we have done such a tremendous season that, as I said to Geoffrey, it would be more rest to be quite alone for a little while."

"I don't quite see why it should all fall upon you," I said to her.

But she replied very quickly :

"My dear Mr. Winter, if any trouble for Mrs. Poplin-Browne falls upon anyone, that one should be me. Nothing that I could ever do would repay all that she has done in the past for me. It is a very small return on my part, and one that I am most happy in being able to make. Pray do not say another word. Perhaps, later on, you and Mrs. Winter many come down to us at the Towers ; when she has got over the first horror and suddenness of it all, she won't mind seeing one or two intimate friends. If she does, why, I shall just tell you frankly, and you will understand without any question of offence."

So they went off by the boat the next day. Sinclair offered to take them over in the yacht, but both d'Ecie and his wife thought that it would be better to go by the regular steamer.

"There will be no publicity," she said, "and besides, it is better for her not to be too much shut up with her grief. We shall have a deck cabin, and she will be as well as she could be anywhere."

We went down to the boat, Sinclair and I, to see

them go; Nell, indeed, went and packed all Mrs. Poplin-Browne's belongings, and took the entire charge of conveying them to the boat, where the d'Ecies were to meet them. Mrs. Poplin-Browne was quite calm and composed, but she looked ghastly pale, and after shaking hands with us, went straight to her cabin with the two little girls. I admit that the feeling is selfish, but I felt extremely glad that we were not required to go with them to London, and that my wife was not of necessity compelled to see her through her trouble, as she would have been had the d'Ecies not been at hand.

We dined that night on board the yacht with Edward Sinclair—my wife and I, Major and Mrs. Dare, Phyllis and Billy Sherringham. The twins were not of the party, they having some private engagement of their own to amuse them. We were all very quiet, for although Mrs. Poplin-Browne's worthy husband had not been an intimate of any of us, we were yet saddened by the tragic suddenness of his end. We sat on deck smoking and talking until fairly late, and then went straight home to our respective houses. Poor Mr. Poplin-Browne, sunstroke had carried him off very quickly, and doubtless his place was one that

would soon be filled ; yet that his widow was sincerely broken up by the news of his death was a matter beyond all doubt.

"Mrs. Winter," said Edward Sinclair, just as we were saying good-bye, "you won't like to be going to the Casino for a day or two, will you?"

"No," said Nell. "I shall keep very quiet; I should not like to go to the Casino just for a few days."

"Then supposing we were to make an excursion to Rouen? You must go to Rouen while you are here."

"Yes, I suppose we must," said Nell, looking at me, "but not just now. I don't feel like excursions of any kind, Edward, and they tell me Rouen is rather a hard day's work; I would rather go a bit later and stay a couple of nights, and do the place thoroughly."

"Will you go over to Puy or Pourville?"

"I don't mind that so much," said Nell, doubtfully, "but to tell you the truth, Edward, I would much rather not. I don't know when I have felt so knocked over as I do just now. I need not stop all of you making any excursions you like, or Jack either, but I want to be let alone for a few days till I have got over this a little."

I knew, what Nell had not told everybody else, of the terrible scene that she had gone through with the poor widow, whose first thought had been to blame herself for having allowed her husband to go to the States alone.

"If you were a good sailor, Mrs. Winter," said Sinclair, with genuine concern, "I would ask you to go for a few days' trip on the yacht, so as to make a complete break."

"And I wish I were a good sailor, Edward," said Nell, "just that I might take advantage of your kindness. As I cannot do that, I will just live my own quiet life for a few days, until I feel more like myself again. By the bye, you might come and breakfast with us to-morrow, Edward?"

"In the Faubourg?"

"Yes, quite by ourselves."

"I will come with pleasure," he said.

But his eyes rested for a moment upon Phyl's brilliant face, and I determined to get Nell to include her in the invitation if possible.

It always seems to me that there is something much more awful about a death that takes place thousands of miles away than one which happens quietly within the home circle. I mean like this: when some very dear and precious member of

one's family dies at a great distance from one, it is so hard to realise it. One has to wait so long for all the details; it is an incredible sort of thing which may or may not be true. When all that is left of some poor mortal is lying decently in a shaded room, with flowers in the hands and reverently-closed eyes, one is left in no doubt; there is no mistake, the realisation is there, no matter how sudden may have been the death. But when the fatal news comes, told only in the brief language of a telegram, when one knows no details, when letters bringing more definite news arrive days and days after the first sickening shock has passed over, tearing the wounds of grief open again, when—if the death has been a sudden one—the following mail may bring letters from the one for whom we are mourning, when there comes the dreadful day which brings home the poor personal possessions that have been left behind like so much dross—then one realises how much worse is the far away death than the one which is close at hand.

It could not have made any difference to either the poor widow or her dead husband if we had gone on with our lives exactly as we had done aforetime; it could not have mattered to them in

the very least whether Nell had taken excursions or frequented the Casino during those first few days just as usual; but it would have made all the difference to her. To Nell the shock, and the grief and distress which had followed it, had appealed very strongly. For all her good spirits and buoyant nature, my wife's temperament is one of the most sympathetic I have ever known, so that I determined that she should not be harrassed by being taken out of herself until she really wished it.

So several days went by. I gave Nannie Dare a hint to leave Nell to me, and having found a very decent carriage with a not too idiotic driver, and a nice little cob between the shafts, I took her out every afternoon, driving only to the nearest villages, where we treated ourselves to tea and galettes, coming quietly home in time for dinner. So, for the best part of a week, we saw little or nothing of our friends or of the gay party at the *Maison Moitte*. Then, one morning, before we had seated ourselves at *déjeuner*, Nannie Dare came up in such an evident blaze of excitement that Nell instinctively put out her hand as if to prepare herself for bad news.

"What is it, Nannie?" she asked, holding out

one hand to her sister, and stretching out the other as if for protection to me.

"My dear, such a thing has happened! I assure you, Nell, I don't know how to tell you! You might have knocked me down with a feather—it took my breath away! I—I—really, I am so astonished I don't know how to tell you!"

"But what has happened?"

I knew by instinct what was coming.

"I could have put you up to that a long time ago," I said, looking quizzingly across the table at my sister-in-law.

"What! You noticed it? Well, I declare! That was what Edward Sinclair said. 'Surely,' he said, 'it has been apparent to everyone of you for weeks past!' It has been going on under our very noses, and we never saw or suspected a thing!"

"Then have you and Bob given your consent?"

"What *are* you talking about, Jack?" Nell demanded.

"Ask your sister to tell you her news," I replied.

"What is it, Nannie?" Nell asked.

"Well, dear, Edward Sinclair has proposed to Phyl."

"Oh, yes, I expected that," said Nell. "I thought something unexpected had happened, by what you said. Surely you knew something of the sort was in the wind?"

"Knew it! Why, she's a child—she's a baby! It's the most preposterous thing I ever heard of in my life! Why, when Edward Sinclair came to ask Bob's consent, Bob burst out laughing in his face. It's absurd!"

"Yes, I daresay it is. But while to you she's a baby—to you she's a child—to Edward Sinclair she's a grown-up young lady of seventeen, and of a perfectly marriageable age."

"A marriageable age—Phyllis! Why, it's too silly," said Nannie excitedly.

"But what did Bob say?"

"Bob told him to wait a few years, and if Phyl was in the same mind then, we might think about it."

"Oh, my dear Nannie, how very silly of you. I should make them wait until she's turned eighteen, of course, before you hear of the day being fixed or anything of that kind; but such an exceptionally good match as Edward Sinclair is not to be found every day, even when a girl is so pretty—so more than pretty—as Phyl is."

"But Phyl is a baby," repeated Nannie Dare helplessly.

"Nonsense; Phyl is seventeen—nearly eighteen. And, if I remember rightly, you were married just at that age."

"So I was," said Nannie, in a tone of sudden realisation, as if she had at that very moment just discovered that such had been the case.

"And dear old Bob, kind and good and delightful as he has always been, was not a rich young man like Edward Sinclair, with a yacht and a place in the country, and a town house, and everything that one wishes for one's girls. Bob was merely an ensign in a marching regiment, and you had all your work to make both ends meet. Really, Nannie, I do not want to say anything unfeeling to either you or dear old Bob, but for you two to deny your consent to such an exceptional match on the score of your daughter's age comes with a very curious grace."

"I suppose it does," said Nannie, with another gasp of surprise. "Yes, I suppose it does. But somehow it seems so different when it is one's daughter and not one's self, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does; at any rate it would seem

so. What does dear Phyl say herself on the subject?"

"Oh, Phyl! Well, to tell you the truth, she seems to think we are very hard-hearted, and I left her shut up in her bedroom, and I'm sure she was crying her heart out."

"Poor child," said Nell, "poor child. What a shame!"

CHAPTER XVI.

OPPOSITION.

I BELIEVE that Charles Kingsley had a character in his charming book, "The Water Babies," called "Mrs. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by." It has often struck me that only a man could have drawn such a character. Do-as-you-would-be-done-by seems to be foreign to even the sweetest and the most charming feminine nature. One would think that a mother who had married with a perfectly happy result at the age of seventeen would be sympathetic to the love affairs of her own daughter when she had reached that delectable age. But, as a rule, you will not find mothers, who have themselves made early marriages, at all sympathetic to their daughters when they propose doing the same thing. No young girl could have had a better chance of marrying well than that which Phyl had received from Edward Sinclair. He is just ten years older

than she is; comes, as his name indicates, of a good family; is extremely good-looking, and extremely well off. More than that, there is something intensely wholesome and straight and honest about Edward Sinclair. He is what is familiarly called nowadays a square man, and his feeling for Phyllis is beyond all question of doubt. So, for the matter of that, is Phyl's feeling for him. Not one single word has either Bob Dare or Nannie to urge against him or against the marriage. All Nannie keeps saying is, "But Phyl is so young; I never thought of this for her." As if that had anything to do with it. Nell is ever so much more sensible.

"All I can say is, Nannie," she remarked very sensibly once or twice, "if Baby has such a good chance of settling when she grows up, I shall not be foolish enough to throw any obstacles in the way. Men who are young, and good-looking, and rich, and *respectable*," with emphasis, "are not to be had every day for the asking."

"But, somehow, I never thought of Phyl being married," said Nannie.

"Then, my dear girl, the sooner you do think of it the better," retorted Nell promptly.

But as to thinking about it, and getting the

affair settled out of hand—no! Nannie and Bob have hummed and hawed, and thought it over, and talked and considered, and shaken their two wise heads over the matter, until now Edward Sinclair has gone off for a few days' yachting in a regular huff.

"You know, Winter," he said to me, half an hour before he steamed out of the harbour, "it really is too bad to be humbugged about in this absurd kind of way."

"But, my dear fellow," I said, "don't forget that the child herself has not treated you in any way but the right way."

"Oh, the child herself," he echoed, "she's all right. And I am going away solely and wholly on her account, at least—no, I'm not, Winter; that's not true. I am going away because I cannot stop here without seeing her, and I cannot bear to see her as she is looking now, with her sweet little face on tenterhooks of anxiety. I think they are behaving abominably to both of us."

"So do I, my dear fellow, so do I; so does my wife."

"Your wife!"

"My wife. She has almost quarrelled with her sister half a dozen times already over it."

"If they'd anything against me," he began miserably, looking out over the Bassin with angry eyes.

"Oh, they've nothing against you; their only idea is that Phyl is too young."

"She'll mend of that—she'll mend of that with every day that passes over our heads. It is absurd to raise such an objection. I don't mind waiting a reasonable time."

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I brought my hand down with a good slap upon his broad shoulders.

"My dear fellow," I said at last, "I don't think either you or Phyl need upset yourselves very much. There's a curious obstinacy about Major Dare and his wife, which you must give them a certain time to get over. They have always been the same. But Phyllis was not given her resolute little chin for nothing, and she will stick to you, never fear."

"Yes, but the waste of time," he urged.

"Ah, there I agree with you. For my own part I believe in early marriages; the only regret of my whole married life has been that my wife and I were not married at the end of one month instead of having waited four."

I think I sent the poor old chap off in better spirits than he would otherwise have gone in. I went home and retailed the conversation to Nell, and told her for pity's sake to give her sister and Bob Dare no rest until they had come round to a reasonable frame of mind.

How curious it is, that want that I mentioned just now—the want of do-as-you-would-be-done-by in the feminine character. What a blissful world this would be if do-as-you-would-be-done-by was the ruling maxim. And what a curious world it would be! We should have to be educated up to it, all of us. I have a very good mind to write a story—I suppose it would have to be for the young, for all stories with a moral are for the young, which is hard upon them, poor things—and make it one of everyday life in a family which carried out this principal in its entirety. What would be the effect? Would they be prigs or angels? Would they be insipid or interesting? Would the effect be smooth and easy, or would entanglements come as a matter of course? I do not know; I cannot make up my mind. One could only really answer such a question when one had worked such a tale out to the very end—to the natural end.

I had a little talk with Nanna on the subject of

Phyl's love affairs that very evening. You see, Nanna is not an ordinary servant; she is quite one of the Dare family, and Phyl is her especial treasure and joy.

"Ah, shure," was her remark, "and the poor jintilman's gone away sore at heart. Eh, dear, but it's sad and drare to think of. It puzzles me sore to think what can have come to the masther and the maisthress; they used to be so gay and so aisy—sort o' take things as they come, like. Faith, an' maybe 'tis the fortune Miss Browne left the maisther. Sometimes it's a bad thing when fortunes come; they have a divil of an effect on human natur'. But shure, Maisther Sinclair's a foine jintilman an' a thrue; shure an' he didn't take the right course. Now, if I was he, an' if I was in love with a swate young lady like Miss Phyllis, I'd no' go off while the maisther and maisthress were busy making up their minds. Shure, an' I'd make up their minds for them, I would that same."

"And how would you do it, Nanna?" I enquired.

I always enquire further when Nanna gives dark hints of hidden circumstances.

"Shure, sorr," she returned, as she sat there rocking my baby to and fro, exactly as if she were

defending her from her own father and mother, "begorra, an' it's a fine yacht of his ain he's got, an' if I was him I'd just invagle Miss Phyllis aboard o' her, an' I'd stand out about a mile, an' I'd send a bit of a note, an' I'd say, 'Shure an' I'm sorry to put it in this way, but if ye don't give me yer consint in the twinkling of an eye, I'll just sail to ould Oireland with her.'"

I roared.

"Ah, well, Nanna, Mr. Sinclair has gone now," I said, when I could find my voice, "and so he can't put that little idea into practice for the present ; but what would Mrs. Dare say if she knew that you had such mutinous ideas into your head ?"

She looked at me wisely over the golden head of my child.

"Shure, an' Mrs. Dare, sorr," she remarked, "Mrs. Dare an' me, we understand one anither complately. Mrs. Dare has never ventured to set foot in my blessed babe's nursery since first Mr. Sinclair spoke out to Miss Phyllis; and let me tell ye, Mr. Winter, sorr," she continued, "Miss Phyllis is no child that ye can play pranks wi,' as if she was the strongest o' the strong. For all her swateness and her brightness an' her angel's face, there is that in Miss Phyllis's heart that will not stand pining; and

shure, if Mr. Sinclair comes near me, maybe an' I'll give him the straight tip to the best of my ability."

"Oh, well, well, well, they cannot wish that Phyllis should be unhappy, only that she shouldn't do anything which is not quite for the best, Nanna," I said easily. "And, after all, a few days' deliberation is, perhaps, better than letting a lover think that his sweetheart's people are but too anxious to get rid of her. He will value her the more when he does get her, Nanna."

"Shure, an' there's the wisdom o' all the howly saints in what ye say, sorr!"

Nanna and I are in complete accord with one another.

To go back to the subject of Do-as-you-would-be-done-by, there is no knowing what the effect of such a regime would be ; but in everyday life how very often one sees the effect of the want of following such a system. I remember once a rich girl of my acquaintance—a very rich girl, sole heiress to her father's name, which was worth nothing, and to his wealth, which was worth a good deal—who, as a fad, took up a craze for journalism. She happened one evening to meet with a certain editor—the editor of a very smart, up-to-date, almost

risky society journal. The next day she called upon him in his office.

"I daresay," she said, "that you are very much surprised to see me, but I am very keen on getting journalistic work. I see that you have no column in your paper for women—mere chit-chat. Will you start such a column, and will you let me do it?"

The man looked at the large, handsome, well-dressed woman, and said to her:

"Well, Miss Longfellow, I am very sorry, but you are just a day too late. I have arranged for the very column you propose, and I have already given it to somebody else."

For a moment she did not speak, then she looked at the editor, and said:

"If it is a fair question, who is going to do it?"

"Oh, there is no secret about it," he replied; "Miss O'Leary is going to write it for me."

"Well," said Miss Longfellow, "Miss O'Leary cannot do such a column a bit better than I can; in fact, I don't think she can do it as well. I go everywhere, see everything, have plenty of time at my disposal, and it is work which I love, and am most keen on doing. What are you going to pay for it?"

"A guinea a week."

"A guinea? I will do it for half."

Now this was a case in which the principal actor did not do as she would be done by; no, nor the second actor; but I devoutly hope, with all my heart, that the third principal actor in the little tragedy—the unfortunate Miss O’Leary, to whom every penny she could make was of the most vital importance—would have taken just the contrary course. It is astonishing how seldom you find the do-as-you-would-be-done-by principle in what may be called active service. I heard the other day a very singular story, that of a young boy who went to call on a lady one very hot summer’s afternoon. He had been on terms of the closest intimacy with her, and she made him extremely welcome, and asked him if he would like some tea.

"Thank you very much," said this boy, with perfect frankness, "I won’t have any tea because I have just had some beer."

"Then," said the lady, "you must be drunk."

She called her husband from his own room, and told him that her visitor was drunk, and insisted upon his being put out of the house. And he was deliberately put outside the door, in spite of his pro-

test that he had never been less drunk in his life. Not only that, but this charitable lady made it her business to go to several of the most pleasant houses at which this boy visited to warn the respective occupants that he had come to her house drunk on the previous day, and that they must in future have nothing whatever to do with him. The natural inclination of each and all of these people was to say, "But if this is so, and this boy is drinking, we must ask him to our houses in order to prevent the mischief going further." And so he was saved from absolute social ruin.

Think in such an instance as this what "Do-as-you-would-be-done-by" would have accomplished, what it did accomplish to those who showed the principle. Even had that boy been hopelessly drunk, "Do-as-you-would-be-done-by" would have said, "Dear, dear, how dreadful to think that so young a boy should have taken to such wrong ways. Think, if it was a boy of my own, how I should feel. He is away from his mother, away from home, and all of his own people; he is on his own responsibility for the first time in his life; I must never breathe this to a soul; I must do everything I can to prevent the mischief going any further!" Oh, I believe that "Do-as-you-

would-be-done-by" would, if she could be made the fashion, bring about that peace of mind which we only associate with the millenium.

I could give you another instance of a very similar lady. This lady went to live in a new locality—she and her husband. One day when they had been many months resident in the town, they were calling upon a certain friend—or I should more correctly say, upon a certain acquaintance. In the course of conversation they said to this lady, "You know, we are very much surprised that you are so intimate with Mrs. Jones. Don't you know that there is something against her?"

"Yes," said the lady, "I do know."

"And does that make no difference? Do you not object to knowing her—does not your husband object to your being friendly with her?"

"Not at all," said the lady. "In the first place, the something against her was, when it happened, we consider, more to her credit than to her detriment, and whether or no, all took place many years ago, and can make no manner of difference to us. And, if you will excuse me saying so quite plainly, we think that it is unfriendly and very unchristian of you to rake up an old story which

has almost been forgotten, and one of which you do not know the exact rights. From people professing the religious principles that you and your husband profess, we simply do not understand that you can be glad to spread an ill story of anyone, that you can bring yourselves to try to push down those who are, and have been for many years past, trying to stand upright, and we would have you to understand clearly that this is a subject on which you must never approach us again."

Can you understand ill-natured little paragraphs in the paper, no matter how true, which disclose some painful incident of the past, which perpetuate a lie, which can be no mortal good to any human being? I cannot. I know a woman at this moment who hates me — hates me bitterly, blindly, unreasonably; and why? Because a great friend of mine knew her when she was down in the world — knew her when she was neither socially nor in any other way the person she is to-day. I cannot account for her enmity in any other way, save than that she imagines that I spend my time spreading this particular bit of information about her. I never do it. Why should I? What is it to me whether a great artist was born in a workhouse or a palace? Indeed,

purple and fine linen are not conducive to greatness. It is those who have something to win, who toil early and late, who show what stuff they are made of. It is not, as a rule, the pen of a duchess which thrills the world from end to end, any more than the jewels and properties of a woman of fashion draw tears from all eyes on the other side of the footlights. In the case of one who achieves distinction, no matter in what branch of art, science, or literature, it cannot matter to the outside public what his forbears have been. But one thing is very certain in every relation of life, that one can never go far wrong if one follows the principle of "Do-as-you-would-be-done-by."

CHAPTER XVII.

BY THE WAYSIDE.

I HAD such a surprise the day that Edward Sinclair went off on his lonely trip, leaving all his heart's hopes behind him and carrying baffled rage and fury as his extremely unpleasant companions. I went down to the *bassin* to see him start, and, strolling back along by the Quai and the Arcade, I ran against a man I knew, who was just coming out of the Café Suisse.

"Hullo!" said he.

"Why, bless my soul, Jervis," I cried, "you don't mean to say that you are here in Dieppe?"

"Indeed I am. What are you doing on this side of the water?" he returned.

"Oh, I am spending the summer here with my wife and daughter."

"I didn't know that you had a daughter, Winter."

"Well, I have. She is a small person that can but just toddle."

"Old fellow, come and have a drink with me," he said, linking his arm hospitably in mine.

"My dear Jervis," I returned, "drinks are not altogether in my line. I seldom touch them except at meals; but I am so delighted to see you, old boy, that I will break my rule just to oblige you."

We turned into the Café Suisse and sat down at one of the tables near to the door. My old friend Jervis, sometime commanding officer of the Irish Plungers, the smartest cavalry regiment I had ever known, gave the necessary orders, and then I asked him what had brought him to Dieppe, of all places in the world.

"Well, my dear chap," he said, "I have come here to try and recover myself after one of the most terrible blows that has ever befallen me."

"My dear fellow, what has happened? Lost your money? Surely not that!"

"No, not that; I am very comfortably off, thanks be to goodness," he replied. "Winter, you are a lucky devil."

"Why?"

"Because you have got the nicest little wife in all Christendom."

"Well, I have," I replied; "that's quite true.

But why don't you try and get one to match her?"

"My dear chap," he said, "I've been thinking of that for the last six weeks. I daresay you and other friends of mine have often wondered why I never married. I don't now."

"Dear, dear, you don't say so! Is it a serious story?"

"Well, I have just had an awakening, my dear John Strange, a terrible awakening!"

"What, have you found her out?"

"Oh, worse than that, much worse than that. My theory is that you can find a woman out and still have a glamour. I will tell you about it. You know when I came to the end of my command, indeed of an extra year of command for that matter—for that was granted to me as a special favour, and perhaps as a sop for various odds and ends of knuckling under in bygone years—to my disgust I received one morning an intimation that I was, after a couple of months' leave, to proceed to the one climate in the world which I knew I could not stand, and there take over the duties of an important staff appointment.

"Being in London and at a loose end for the

moment, I got into a cab and went off to the War Office to see if I could not get speech of the powers that be. I did effect my object, and was received very much as an ungrateful child might be received after having flatly refused some unusually dainty sugar-plum. 'I am more sorry than I can say, Sir Charles,' I said, in my most apologetic tone, 'but the fact is I can't stand the climate. I suppose I have been named for this because my regiment was out there. So it was, but my record will show you that I was never able to stop there for six consecutive months during the whole time that I was supposed to be serving there.'

"'That's a pity,' said Sir Charles coolly, 'because you are the very man for the post. However, you had better go out and try it, and if you find that the climate—'

"'I am not going to try it, Sir Charles,' I said promptly.

"'Oh, you're not?'

"'No, it is out of the question.'

"'Then,' he said, in an extremely bored tone, 'I don't see that there is anything more to be said on the subject.'

"He turned back to the table at which he was half sitting, and began to fidget about among his

papers as a plain hint that the interview was at an end and that I might take myself away.

"I got up in what was about the most boiling passion I had known for years. That I, Maunsel Jervis, who had just vacated the command of the Irish Plungers, with thirty years' unblemished record behind me, should be shrugged out by a mere official's presence with as little courtesy or respect as he might have given to a subaltern with five and twenty years' less service than I, was simply preposterous. I realised that I was being dismissed, and I sat down again ; I sat tight. 'I am to understand that no change can or will be made,' I said, holding myself in so as to be calm and cool.

"He replied without looking at me. 'I don't believe it is possible,' he said quietly. 'You see, there has been a good deal of discontentment on the score of what those brutes at the House call favour. There was the very devil of a row when St. John got out of going out to Burmah when it was his turn, and they sent Fox-White instead. But for that, Fox-White would have gone to Dublin, and while they were still haggling over the matter he went and died . . . of the climate. It gave the chief so much trouble that he declared

from that time forward men must go where they are sent, and run the risk of climate, as the ranks have to do.'

" 'Very good,' I said, rising again. 'I don't intend to go to the Raiput Plains again, so I will send in my papers at once. Good-morning.'

"He got up too with a great show of civility. 'Well, good-bye, colonel,' he said. 'And if ever I can do anything for you, of course you have only to command me. And I need hardly say that this is no doing of mine. I only wish I could have arranged things more to your satisfaction.'

"I assured him that I was perfectly sure of his good intentions.

" 'As a matter of fact,' he said mysteriously, 'if you do send in your papers, giving as a reason the fact that you cannot, for climatic reasons, risk Raiput, I should say that you will be asked to reconsider the step, and that some concession will be made. Good-bye, my good fellow, good-bye.'

"I did send in my papers; I did give my reasons for so doing; but I was not asked to reconsider my decision. On the contrary, the powers simply accepted my withdrawal, and in due course of time I found myself at forty-eight, well off, well set up, and well looking, without a relation in the world,

at a loose end, and absolutely without an object in life. The prospect was horrible.

"Probably a more lonely man than I would have been hard to find if you had searched the length and breadth of the kingdom. I was neither an invalid nor a misanthrope; I was not a woman hater, nor in any way a recluse. But I was alone. I had been in some ways distinctly unlucky. Not in money matters—I had enough money and to spare—but in friendship and in love. I could not make up my mind where I should pitch my tent. I had never stayed in any one place sufficiently long to gather anything in the shape of friendly moss, although I had hundreds of friends in all parts of the world. Still among these there were few, almost none, whom I cared sufficiently for to wish to pitch my tent in close proximity to them, or in whom I was sufficiently interested to want to settle by them for the rest of my life.

"I therefore decided, as London is the centre of the world, and as everyone goes there sooner or later, that it would make a fine point at which I could halt and watch for glimpses of my many friends from time to time.

"Alas for the futility of human vision! I was

no sooner comfortably settled in town, having made myself a most cosy home in a suite of rooms off St. James's, than I found that I must clear out of the modern Babylon, unless I wanted to be cleared out in another and less responsible manner. I was furious at the turn events had taken; but my doctor was firm and admitted of no compromise. 'My dear sir,' he said, when I suggested that I had many engagements, and could not possibly leave London just then, 'I don't care a brass farthing about your engagements. Get out of London fogs you must, and at once. Engagements, indeed! You'll very soon have an engagement down at Woking, if you don't look out.'

"I followed the example of that wise Psalmist of old—'I held my tongue and spake nothing.' I put a couple of guineas into Dr. Dillory's palm, and thanked him for his frankness. 'I never find it of the smallest use to be anything else,' he said, as he grasped my hand. 'Some doctors don't seem to see the difference between frankness and brutality. "'There's a vast o' difference,'" as the old gardener at my country cottage says. It's no use a doctor shilly-shallying with a man like yourself, who can go away if he will and

where he will. At the same time, if a little woman comes to me and I gather that she has six small children, and I grasp from external evidence that she has been put to it to scrape my fee together, it's not the least use my telling her to go to Egypt for the winter, nor yet to take a voyage round the world. The only thing I can do for that little woman is to bid her wear a respirator, keep her feet dry, to avoid standing in the street, and to keep out of east winds. Such advice isn't worth two guineas, so I generally put it back into her hand again, and tell her to send me a few patients with a little more the matter with them. I sometimes wonder whether such poor souls realise the truth as they walk away down the street.'

"'But you have told me the truth, doctor?' I asked.

"'My dear sir, the naked truth,' he replied. 'Stay in London with that left lung of yours, and—' A long pause was infinitely more eloquent than words. He put out his hand again. 'Keep out of London during nine months of the year, and you will be as right as a trivet. Good-bye, good-bye!'

The truth which I realised as I walked away

down the street was, I must say, most unpalatable to me. It was that I must at once uproot myself and make a fresh start. Now, as a matter of fact, I had moved about so continually during my thirty years of service that I wanted, now that I had come to my half century, or at least very nearly so, to spend the rest of my time in peace and quietness. It was no pleasure to me, the prospect of everlastingly moving about. It sounds very well going to Paris for Easter, to London for the season, to Homburg for August, and Scotland for the autumn, to Monte Carlo for the winter, and to some sunny place for the early spring. But in reality I hate Paris at Easter when it is over-run by cheap trippers; I detest Homburg because I never drink waters, or need to do so, not being of a gouty habit. I do like a Yorkshire moor or a Scotch shooting or salmon river as well as anybody; but Monte Carlo I loathe, and the Riviera is to me the most over-rated part of the whole world. Yet where was I to go—what was I to do? I had got Dillory's orders, and they, goodness knows, were explicit and urgent enough. No wonder that I went into the Rag feeling as blue as I must have looked.

“‘Hollo, Jervis,’ said a voice as I crossed the

hall. 'What's amiss with you? You look as if you had buried your mother-in-law.'

"I turned. 'Oh, it's you, Saunders, is it? How are you, old fellow? Was I looking blue? I never had a mother-in-law to bury, so I don't know how I should look under those circumstances. The truth is, Saunders, I've had rather a knock under this morning. I've been to Dillory, and he says I must get out of London and never risk it again between August and May.'

"'Good God!'" said Saunders blankly. 'What is it? Chest? I always thought you were as strong as a horse, Jervis.'

"'Ah, so did I,' I rejoined ruefully. 'However, it is no use crying over spilt milk. I've got my route and off I must be at once.'

"'Well, let us lunch together at any rate,' he suggested.

"I agreed to this proposal gladly enough, for my thoughts were such as did not make me anxious to be alone.

"'If I were you I'd have a glass of fizz,' said Saunders, as we seated ourselves at a table. 'It's the best pick-up in the world. Nothing like it if you feel a bit down in the mouth. By the way, who did you say you went to? Dillory?'

“‘Yes, I take it he is about the best man for chest troubles,’ I replied.

“‘Oh, quite the best. And a square man to boot. I hate niminny-piminny doctors, who don’t tell you the truth. Dillory isn’t one of that kind,’ he said, just as a man who has never ailed anything worse than a broken collar-bone in all his born days does speak. ‘And did he tell you where you were to go, old fellow?’

“‘Not at all, only out of London fogs into the purest air I can find.’

“‘That will be Monte, of course,’ he said, with a jovial laugh.

“‘Not a bit of it, I hate Monte,’ I rejoined irritably. ‘I think it is the most over-rated place in existence. I shall go to St. Mildred’s.’

“I have never had the least idea what put the idea of going to St. Mildred’s into my head. I never had been there, and had never meant to go there. I knew no one who lived there and—I suppose it was Fate and nothing else. Saunders gave a long low whistle.

“‘St. Mildred’s,’ he echoed, in profoundest astonishment. ‘By Jove, I’d as soon be in my long home at once. St. Mildred’s! Ye gods! It’s full of retired men of both Services and—’

“‘My dear chap, *I am a retired Service man,*’ I said rather tartly. ‘I’ve lived among Service men all my life, and now that I’m practically smashed up, I shall be better among retired Service men than among any other. And besides, society at St. Mildred’s is not confined to retired men. There is a big camp not two miles away, the golf links rank next to St. Andrews, and the county set is quite out of the ordinary. And, besides that, there’s the artistic colony at Podlesmere within five miles, and as it is the starting place of one of the biggest and most important lines of Channel steamers, communication with Paris and all the rest of the Continent is extremely easy.’

“‘By Jove, I never thought of all those advantages,’ he said, in a mystified way. ‘Well, on my soul, I don’t know that you could do better. What a pity it is that you never married, old fellow! By Jove, there’s nothing like a wife for setting you to rights when you get over your first bloom. I know I couldn’t get on without mine for very long together.’

“‘*Je n’ai pas de chance de tout,*’ I remarked sententiously.

“In one way it was true enough, God knows.

When Saunders had left me I sat in a big chair thinking things over, and among other ways that my thoughts drifted was to the cause of why I had got to be forty-eight years old without having someone to keep me company, and to prevent me from being lonely and given to the blues. Well, I had had no luck in that way, if I had fared very well in most others. I had dreamed dreams like most other men; I had had my romance and my temptations, my failures and my disappointments. It was no use going back over it all then, over that time, let me see how many years ago, when I had lived for the sound of a voice, when I had yearned fiercely for the touch of two smiling lips, when Fate had been against me, sheer hard dead against me, and my loneliness to-day was the result.

“And yet I could not help thinking and thinking about her. Well, it was not of the least use, for she had married years and years before, when I was only a very young sub, too young, as she said in her sweet way, to feel things very deeply. I had felt it deeply all the same, far too deeply ever to look at any other woman, although, goodness knows, and without saying too conceited a thing of myself, I had had opportunities enough accorded

me of doing so. Ah, well, well, it was no use sitting there grizzling over what was done years and years ago and could not be undone now. Little Mayvie, with her deep-blue, dark-set eyes, her rippling, ruddy brown hair, her audacious mouth and her snowflake hands, had gone out of my life, and had passed as clean away from me as if she had never been. Stay, it was not quite like that, for if she had never been, I might years ago have settled down with a charming wife, and have been a well-cared for and contented sort of family man, instead of which I was then a lonely disappointed waif upon the ocean of life. But—and here I got up with a start and fairly shook myself. ‘Maunsel Jervis, Maunsel Jervis,’ I asked myself, ‘are you the ex-commanding officer of one of the smartest cavalry regiments in the Service, forty-eight years old, blessed with a respectable income more than enough for all your needs, with a handsome enough face and no chest below the belt, or are you turning into a drivelling old fool? Good God, get up, man, and get about your business, and start yourself *en route* for St. Mildred’s. Heaven knows you never had such thoughts as these when

you were soldiering. Dillory was quite right in saying that London was bad for you.'

"And that was just how I came to pitch my tent at St. Mildred's.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE AWAKENING.

"I LEFT London enveloped in a dense and greasy yellow fog, such as certainly did not tend to increase my regrets at having been once more rooted up from my moorings. I arrived at St. Mildred's to find the whole coast and town bathed in brilliant sunshine, to see roses still blooming here and there on sunny walls, to see ladies tripping about in garments which looked but little more heavy than they would wear in summer, and to feel that my own overcoat was absolutely out of place.

" 'An unusually fine day for the time of year,' I remarked to the waiter who came to serve my lunch.

"He shrugged his shoulders doubtfully.

" 'I don't know so much about that, sir,' he replied. 'It's mostly like this down here. That's why they call it "sunny St. Mildred's." You might

think that we want to crack the place up, and so, in a way, we do. But, apart from business, if there is a gleam of sunshine anywhere on the coast we seem to get it.'

"'And feel quite ill-used if you have a bad spell now and again, I suppose,' I remarked, with a smile.

"'Well, it's true the old gentlemen do grumble then,' said he.

"'And there are a good many old gentlemen, I daresay.'

"'Why, yes, sir; a good many like yourself, who have worn the Queen's uniform.'

"'Now, how did you know I had ever been in the Service?' I demanded.

"'That's plain enough for anyone to see, sir,' he returned, smiling. 'You carry it stamped on you. "Cavalry colonel just over his command," I said to myself when you came in. I know the cut well. I was once a soldier myself.'

"'The deuce you were!' I turned and looked at him with a new interest. "'And what—?'

"'Waiter!' called an impatient voice from the further end of the room.

"'Yes, sir, coming!' he called back. 'Ten years I had of it in the Old Black Horse. . . . Yes, sir, coming!'

He came back to me presently and hovered around, waiting to take my plate.

“‘So you were in the Black Horse?’ I said.

“‘I was, sir.’

“‘And you’re an Irishman?’

“‘I am that same, sir.’

“‘Ah, I was quartered at Aldershot once with the Black Horse. My regiment was the Irish Plungers. Barring my own, I would as soon have been in the Black Horse as any.’

“‘’Tis a fine regiment, that same, sir,’ said he, with a bit of a sigh, which he stifled instantly. ‘It near broke my heart to leave it. But my old master would have me go with him—he bought me out, sir—and after three years he died and left me stranded. I knew a good bit about waiting, having been in the Mess in my time, so I took on this billet, and I’ve stuck to it ever since.’

“When I had finished my lunch I went out to explore the place a little, to have a look at the Club, and find out whether there were any people whom I had met before. I did not see many people about, so I went to the Club, and there found Johnnie Dynnevor, whom I had known long before in India.

"'Why, God bless my soul,' he exclaimed, as he caught sight of me, 'it's Jervis! And what good wind has blown you down here, my boy?'

"'No wind at all, but London fogs,' I replied, as I grasped his genial hand. 'I have come to look for a habitation. And what do you do here, eh?'

"'On the shelf, my boy, on the shelf,' he replied. I perceived that he had not lost his old habit of always saying things twice over. 'And take it all round, I don't know a better spot to make a shelf of than St. Mildred's. Now, in town, once outside my Club, I always feel that I am making too much noise, and that I shall get taken in. Damn, it's most unpleasant.'

"'You're married, I suppose?'

"'Married, sir. . . . Gad, I should think I was. Number three, sir, number three,' he roared.

"'Bless me, you don't say so. Good heavens and I have never managed to get married once.'

"'Ah, that's a mistake. If I was left, gad, sir, I should have to look out for another. I always tell my wife so, yes—by Jove, I do!'

"'Perhaps the next will be a hat,' I remarked, feeling all at once a thrill of compunction for the third Mrs. Dynnevor.

"Johnnie laughed boisterously.

"'Ah, I shouldn't wonder, I shouldn't wonder,' he bawled. 'But the Dynnevors are a deuced long-lived race. My dear old mother, bless her, only died about three months ago, and she died of an accident. Well, it's no use talking of one's troubles, is it? Where are you going to pitch your tent?'

"I told him that I did not know, having arrived less than two hours before.

"'I am staying at the Dragon for the moment,' I replied.

"'The Dragon? H'm! I doubt if you could do better than come to an arrangement with the people at the Dragon. You won't get a flat here; the servants are terrible hussies—at least my wife is always wailing about them. Good cooks are at a premium, and have a trick of leaving you just at the beginning of the season, which is deuced unpleasant. You'll be far better off at the Dragon, and you can have a sitting-room of your own.'

"The idea was not a bad one, and I said that I would think it over.

"'I don't want to settle anything for a few days,' I told Johnnie. 'I will look about and get the lie of the place before I commit myself.'

“‘And you’ll come and dine with us to-night, just as we are, no ceremony?’ he cried hospitably.

“‘Why, thank you very much, Johnnie,’ I returned. ‘But won’t it put Mrs. Dynnevor about to have a guest sprung upon her so late?’

“‘Not a bit of it; she’s used to it. A dear woman, mind you, and as fond of a visitor as I am, which is saying a good deal. Not that I could stand it if she weren’t. No, by Jove! that I couldn’t. I am an easy-going man, God knows, but the one thing I could not stand would be a wife who would make a fuss if I ask a friend in to dinner. I should mess out—yes, by Jove, that I should.’

“‘Well, if you are quite sure that I shall not be in the way, I should very much like to come and make Mrs. Dynnevor’s acquaintance,’ I said civilly.

“‘If the truth be told, I was not a little curious to see what Johnnie Dynnevor’s wife could be like. Number three, too! And coming to a new place as I had done, without any official position—and this was for the first time in thirty years—I felt that a good fellow like Johnnie could, to a certain extent, make or mar the place for me.

“‘All right. Seven-thirty to the minute, and we

will give you as good a dinner as you will get anywhere in St. Mildred's.'

"He promised to put me up for the Club, and then we parted, as he had faithfully promised his wife to be home at four o'clock to go to some afternoon function with her.

" 'I generally shirk these sort of things,' he roared, with a great laugh. 'Not much in my line, you know, not much in my line. But one must show civility to the parson; and he's a dear, good old chap, so I make an exception, and go to Mrs. Parson's afternoon teas.'

"Then we parted, and I went my ways with a view of exploring the town a little. What I saw of it I liked. It was clean, and fresh, and wholesome, with a handsome front and sea-walk, a garden with a band-stand, and all the other attractions of a fashionable seaside place. The houses were of the superior villa order, mostly standing singly or in pairs in well-kept gardens. Just in the centre of the parade was a square, or rather three sides of a square, while at each end a beautiful crescent, with fine gardens, and large and stately houses, turned seawards like the horns of a new moon. There were plenty of evidences of wealth and cultivation, quite as much so, on a

smaller scale, as one finds in London. The whole place had an air of well-keptness, of good grooming, as it were, and I saw several carriages that were irreproachable from every point of view. I felt that I should settle in St. Mildred's as comfortably as any place that I had ever seen.

"I did not go to the Dragon until it was almost time to dress for dinner, not indeed until long after the lamps had been lighted along the parade, and I had looked over the shops in the main street behind the sea-front. My friend, the ex-trooper, was in the hall when I went in.

" 'I shall not be dining here to-night,' I said to him.

" 'Very good, sir. You've met with friends, doubtless ?'

" His tone of friendly interest amused and touched me.

" 'One friend,' I said. 'And, upon my word, I forgot to ask him how long he stayed in the army after I knew him. He used to be Mr. Dynnevor in my time.'

" 'That's Major Dynnevor of Roseneath, I'm thinking,' said the waiter.

" 'Yes, the same. So he is Major Dynnevor ? I did not know it.'

“ ‘Charles!’ called a voice from the distance.

“ ‘Coming, m’m,’ he called back in reply.

“ ‘Stay, I want a sherry and bitters,’ I said hastily.

“ I was not minded to do without my every-day needs because someone in the distance chose to call the waiter away from me.

“ ‘I’ll bring it in two minutes, sir.’

“ He was gone, so I went up to my room and began to put out my things. I hate doing that sort of thing for myself, never having been used to it; but I had had to leave my own man in town to see to the packing of my belongings, and naturally he could not be in two places at once. Charles came in while I was thus occupied.

“ ‘Your sherry and bitters, sir,’ he said; then put the little tray down on the table, and took the things out of my hands. ‘Let me do that, sir,’ he said. ‘It’s a pleasure to valet a gentleman again.’

“ When I was ready, I walked out to Roseneath, which was in the big crescent at the extreme west end of the front, and arrived there just as the clock was on the point of twenty-five past seven. I saw as soon as the door was opened that Dynnevor was well-off, and that everything was kept in perfect order.

“‘You’re right welcome, old fellow,’ he roared, as he came out into the hall to greet me. ‘And, by Jove, my wife is most excited about your coming. She knows you ; says she met you years and years ago!’

“I followed him into the large and handsome drawing-room, wondering whether I should remember Mrs. Dynnevor and—

“‘Now, my dear, here he is!’ Johnnie bawled.

“‘After all these years,’ said a voice.

“I found myself shaking hands with a comfortable, feather-bed kind of lady, who wore her white hair dressed high, and used, I think, a suspicion of powder on it.

“‘Mayvie! Mayvie!’ I gasped.

“I hope that my tone did not quite convey how utterly taken aback I was. Perhaps not, for she continued to smile at me, and said in the familiar voice—the only part of her that was familiar :

“‘Yes, the same ; only no one ever calls me “Mayvie” nowadays.’

“A mighty thump on the back from Johnnie Dynnevor brought me somewhat to myself again.

“‘Old friend of mine, old friend of hers. On my soul, Jervis, it was a good wind that blew you

down to St. Mildred's,' he shouted. 'I say, old lady,' putting his arm around her ample waist, 'we must take care of the dear old chap for the sake of old times, eh?'

"I think she said something suitable and kindly. I remember seeing her lips move as they smiled, but my head was lost in such a whirl of recollection that I heard nothing. This—this—was the girl for whose sake I had cut myself off from everything feminine during all the best years of my life. This was the Mayvie of my boyhood's most cherished romance, and while I had been nursing her image in my heart as a sacred treasure, she had been developing into a fat, comfortable matron, and later still listening to the ship-in-a-storm-at-sea love-making of Johnnie Dynnevor. Good heavens! I had, indeed, in more senses than one, found myself by the wayside."

I was silent for a moment; then I looked up at Jervis—straight, well-set-up soldier that he was—and asked a question:

"And then, old fellow?"

"I went off to town and risked the fogs, for I couldn't stand Mrs. Johnnie Dynnevor and her reminiscent manner. And then—well—Winter, old chap, I'm off to Aix to-morrow, and if she says

yes—why, I shall bless the old woman for having kept me unmarried all these years.”

“Old chap,” I said, “here’s to your luck.”

“God bless you,” he said, holding out his glass to touch mine.

And within a week I had a wire from him.

“She said yes,” it said.

CHAPTER XIX.

MYSTERY.

PERHAPS it was rather hard lines, when he had torn himself away from the vicinity of his beloved, having for sole reason the fact that he could not bear to see her distressed face any longer, that Edward Sinclair should return unexpectedly and find her enjoying to the full the simple pleasures of a Punch and Judy show! Of course most lovers are unreasonable, and I felt at the moment that it was distinctly unreasonable of Edward Sinclair to be, as he evidently was, furious with Phyllis for the fact that she was still able to smile. She perceived him almost as soon as I did. Her slim young hand was still thrust carelessly through my arm, and probably I gave some involuntary start which caused her eyes to follow the direction of mine.

“Why, there is Edward!” she exclaimed. “Why, how white and queer he looks! Let us go and see

what is the matter. I thought he was not coming back for a week."

She got up from her bench, and we strolled across the lawn together and joined him. He took off his hat with a formality which was a little overdone. He called her Miss Dare, and for a moment or two Phyl was so dismayed that all the cloud settled back again upon her bright young face.

"Why, Edward," she exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing—nothing at all; evidently nothing at all is the matter," he replied, in his coldest tones. "You were enjoying yourself very much just now."

She looked at him blankly for a second or so.

"Why, Edward," she said, with a distinct accent of surprise, not untouched by a *souppçon* of reproachfulness, "and are you vexed with me for enjoying a Punch and Judy show with Jack? You wouldn't have liked to come back and find me walking about like Mariana in 'The Moated Grange,' would you? It's dull enough, and I am miserable enough, goodness knows; but still, one may as well keep up the outside look of enjoying

oneself. Besides, I was enjoying it," she added defiantly, seeing that he did not speak. "I always do enjoy a Punch and Judy show, and Jack is delicious to go with to anything of that kind, because he enjoys it as much as I do. Jack brought me because he thought it would please you to let me do anything that would make me a shade less miserable than I have been for the last five or six days."

I saw signs of melting in Sinclair's face.

"Don't let us stand here; come, let us go across into the reading-room," I said.

Sinclair turned without a word, and Phyllis was perforce obliged, though a little offended, to turn and walk beside me. She kept tight hold of my arm, as if invoking my protection against this unreasonable lover of hers.

We found the reading-room wholly deserted; even the attendant who frequently sits there was away for the nonce. I took up a French newspaper, of which I could not understand a dozen words, having seen Phyllis sit down and absorb herself in the pages of *Punch*. I saw Sinclair, poor chap, cast a hungry kind of glance at her, and then I strolled quietly out as if I in no way belonged to them.

They made it up. I had an English newspaper in my pocket, and I went out on to the terrace and read it with great satisfaction. I had not been there for very long before Bob Dare and Nannie came strolling along.

"Oh, where is Phyl?" said Nannie. "I thought she was with you?"

"She was," I replied; "but the moth has come back to the candle, and the candle seems very well disposed towards the moth."

"Edward Sinclair has come back?" said Nannie.

"Yes, he has come back; let me tell you, Mrs. Nannie Dare, that you will have to come to a definite understanding with that young man, and before very long."

"Time enough," said Nannie.

"Not at all. I advise you to quietly accept the inevitable, and let matters be arranged with comfort to us all. At present, you are ruining the holiday of everybody you know. We are both wretched, Phyl is breaking her heart, and Edward Sinclair is getting desperate."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, come, Jack, that's very silly!" said Nannie Dare, with an attempt at dignity.

"Well, perhaps it is. They are together, and they are happy, and it's not my business as to say where they are; in fact, I don't know. I left them half-an-hour ago, but I don't know where they are now. They are quite safe."

Mrs. Dare sat down upon the broad wall of the terrace, and looked out over the wide stretch of water with eyes full of anxiety and perplexity.

"I'm sure it is very difficult bringing up daughters," she said at last.

"No more difficult for you than for your mother."

"Oh, but we were different."

"Not at all. You wanted to get married when you were very young, and you were married. Your mother, very wisely, seeing that old Bob here was a steady-going sort of fellow, put no obstacles in your way."

"I'm sure," she persisted, "if my mother had told me she would rather that I waited for a few years, I should have waited."

I turned and looked at old Bob.

"Can you say that, old chap?" I asked quietly.

It must be admitted that his eyes fell before mine.

"No, Jack," he said, "I don't think that I can."

Of course, if Nannie's mother had insisted upon our waiting, we should have had to wait."

"But she didn't."

"No, she didn't."

"It's not that I object to Edward Sinclair," Nannie put in eagerly at this point, "not at all. I have always liked Edward Sinclair—he is a very good fellow; but I do think that Phyl is too young to know her own mind."

"No younger than you were," I said.

"Yes, but I was older than Phyl in my ways; Phyl has seen so few people."

"Phyl has lived at Aldershot; Phyl has travelled; Phyl has not been shut up in a school, as I think, if I remember rightly, you were."

"I think it would be so dreadful if she was to change her mind."

"Phyl will have to bear the consequences if she does, not you," I replied.

"Oh, there is something in that, Jack. I know you are right in what you say, all of you; but somehow I feel so reluctant, and I feel I should not be so reluctant if it were not for some purpose; at least, I feel that way."

"What! Are you going to turn clairvoyant in your old age, my dear?" I asked, with a sudden

burst of sarcasm, for if ever there was a little woman, who had trusted absolutely in blind chance in her own case, that little woman was my sister-in-law, Nannie Dare.

"How can you be so silly, Jack?" she asked, with ineffable scorn.

"Because if you are thinking of taking up that line of business," I went on, "I would just warn you of one contingency that may arise at any time. You know you will have to give in in the end, because Phyl has made up her mind that she is going to marry Edward Sinclair, and Edward Sinclair has made up his mind that he will never marry anyone but Phyl. It is only a question of their waiting until the child is of age at the very worst."

"And she will be very young then," said Nannie.

"Yes; and by that time in Edward Sinclair's heart there will have grown a detestation for you which it will be beyond his power, or yours, ever to uproot. If you cast that chap out on to the world for three years of perfectly unnecessary waiting, he will have as lively a feeling of hatred for you when the time comes to an end as any mother-in-law could desire. If you want to be all

the rest of your life what you have been to Phyl up to the present time, it is a risk that you won't run, my dear."

"If Edward Sinclair can feel anything of that kind," said Nannie obstinately, "then he is not the husband for Phyl—he is not fit to marry Phyl. I don't believe Phyl could love a husband who detested and hated her mother, as you want to make out Edward Sinclair detests and hates me."

I groaned in my despair. So far from helping matters, I had run a good chance of making them worse.

"Nannie, Nannie," I said, at last, "what has come to you? You never used to be like this. Let us hope it is not that nice little fortune that Miss Browne left old Bob. One often hears of money spoiling people, but, by Jove, I don't believe if anybody were to leave me thirty millions of money, instead of thirty thousand, it would alter my disposition the least in the world."

"Really, Jack!"

"Ah, you may say, 'Really, Jack!' but I mean every word of it."

In truth I could not tell what had come to the little woman. I could not decide in my own mind whether her opposition was genuine, or whether it

was from sheer perversity. She looked the very picture of distress as she sat on the terrace wall gazing vaguely out over the blue waves.

"It is very tiresome," she burst out at last, "to have this young man coming along, upsetting all our ideas, and our whole family life. I wish we had never come to this place ; it is the sort of place where people fall in love—such nonsense ! Edward Sinclair had nothing else to do. He came here, according to his own showing, to make this his headquarters—his headquarters ! Why, he's never been away from the place more than a few hours all the time we've been here. And we came here, and you came here, John Strange Winter, with the idea of making this place the centre of a series of excursions. And we haven't been anywhere—we have never been outside the place !"

"We went to tea to Pourville the other day," I expostulated.

"Pourville !" she echoed indignantly.

"Well, you may say 'Pourville' as much as you like, and we did go to Pourville, and we did have tea there ; and saw the little Casino, and played on its cracked piano, and looked at the pictures, and ate galettes, and threw stones on the beach, and generally enjoyed ourselves."

"Well, really, Jack, you are too absurd!" she said.

"Well, I may be. Then we went to Puys."

"Yes, I know we went to Puys."

"Well, and we had tea and ices at the big hotel there, and saw the chalet where Lord Salisbury used to live—what more can you want?"

"Pooh! We have done nothing since we came here—literally nothing! We have lived the life of vegetables!"

I looked at poor old Bob; and Bob looked at me with an eye which seemed to say, "Don't answer; let her go on; I'm used to it."

There are times, however, when I like to have my say; so I did not attempt to profit by Major Dare's looks.

"I don't know about living the life of vegetables," I said. "I have certainly done nothing of the kind. If you wanted to spend your summer holiday in railway trains, or in what one may call long distance drives, I do not see what there was to stop you, excepting the attraction of the place as you find them. I can safely say that I have never known a dull moment since I have been here."

"We have never been to Rouen," she said, look-
o

ing at me vexedly, "and we have not been to Paris, nor to Le Havre, nor to any of those nice little seaside places that one hears so much about."

"I don't see what there has been to prevent you, Nannie," I said very quietly. "If it is your taste to go to Paris in August, when there is not a soul in sight, there is no reason why you should not indulge yourself. If you like to go enervating yourself in Rouen, when everybody in Rouen is flying to Dieppe, I don't see what there should be to prevent you."

"Oh, of course you will take the other side—a man would; it is second nature to them," she said loftily. "I don't say that I haven't enjoyed being here, and that I don't like the place, and that I don't enjoy myself in a quiet way very much; but, after all, it is the same thing over and over again—a little walk in the morning, a little excursion in the afternoon, or a tea-party, or a walk up and down on the terrace with one's friends, or a little tennis, a little golf, what you will; but it is just the kind of place where a girl would get entangled in a love affair. There is nothing else to do. Then in the evening a little dancing or music, and a lemon squash, an ice, a

walk on the terrace—and for you men, the excitement of the little horses, and the baccarat room.”

“And what more would you have?” I inquired mildly. “If you wanted a seaside place where you would have the everlasting tread-mill of society, you would not have come here. And if you had gone to such a place, let me tell you, you would have finished old Bob.”

“That’s true,” said Bob, under his moustache.

She turned a pair of startled eyes upon him.

“Oh, don’t say that,” she said quickly.

“Why should he not say it if it is true?” I asked.

“But I did not want a gayer place,” she stammered, looking all at once very guilty.

I seized the opportunity.

“Bob, old fellow,” I said to him, moved to put a direct question by some expression on his good-looking, solemn face, “I’ve never heard you express your ideas on the subject.”

He shifted rather uneasily on his chair; Nannie, from her position on the wall, looked steadily out to sea.

“Oh,” he said at last, almost awkwardly, “the wife knows my ideas on the subject.”

Nannie discreetly kept silence.

"You might as well," I said, "give other people the benefit of them."

"Oh, well," he blurted out, seeing that I was waiting for him to speak, "I think it is all a tremendous fuss about nothing, and for the life and soul of me I can't tell what the deuce Nannie is driving at."

CHAPTER XX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

THAT admission of Bob Dare's was the beginning of the end. It turned out that Nannie Dare's opposition was not, after all, pure obstinacy; for, after much discussion, she at length confided to my wife that a young officer at Aldershot—not one of her husband's brother officers, but a man in the cavalry regiment then quartered there—had bespoken her good offices with Phyllis. It seems that she had asked him not to speak to Phyl, believing—genuinely believing—that the child was too young to dream of anything so grown-up as marriage for several years, and, as she plaintively put it, it seemed so false to go back and have to own that Phyl was engaged, and about to be married.

We were able, mercifully, however, to soothe her mind on the score of this young man, for the

very next day, when Phyl was breakfasting with us, Nell took the opportunity of mentioning his name.

"Is Sir Charles Danby with the Fifth at Aldershot now?" she asked, in the most casual tone possible.

"Sir Charles Danby? Yes, Auntie. Do you know him?"

"No, dear, I never met him, but somebody was speaking of him the other day. What sort of a man is he?"

A quizzical expression swept over Phyl's young face.

"Oh, well, you know, Auntie, he is rather a pal of Mother's. I think he is detestable—so very young and downy, and such side, you know, Auntie, all cuffs and collars, and 'God bless my souls,' and 'don'tcherknows.' He was always hanging about Mother's drawing-room of late; I don't know how she stands it."

Nell repeated this conversation to Nannie, and she seemed to derive great comfort therefrom. And after that she gave in—as of course it was a foregone conclusion that she would do—and Edward Sinclair went off to a jeweller's shop in the Grande

Rue, and bought Phyl several diamond rings, and sundry other pledges of affection.

Things went on more smoothly with us after that, to the great comfort of everybody. When I say that things went more smoothly, I mean to convey that they did not go as smoothly as they might have done. Nor did they, for Nannie Dare—with the curious quality which belongs to most weak people, called by them “firm” and by others “obstinate”—never seemed able to settle down comfortably to the fact that Phyl was a child no longer, but an engaged young lady, who would shortly be married. Whether it was the remembrance of the downy little baronet whom she had left behind at Aldershot, or the fact that for once she had had to bend her will to the wishes of others, I do not know ; but, during those weeks, I many times thanked Heaven that of the two sisters Nell was my wife and not Nannie, for Mrs. Dare had acquired a most disagreeable habit of “letting fly” at Phyl in a way which, had not the child possessed the sweetest disposition in the whole world, she would certainly have bitterly resented.

“Dear me,” she remarked, on the first day after the capitulation, “it looks quite grotesque to see

Phyl with those great diamond rings on. You ought to have chosen them more in accordance with Phyl's age, Edward."

"I chose what I thought Phyl would like, Mrs. Dare," said Edward Sinclair, who, having got his own way, was willing enough for peace at any price.

"Yes, but such huge things for a child like Phyl."

"What sort of an engagement ring had you, Nannie?" I inquired mildly at this juncture, for I had seen a positively agonised look in Phyl's grey eyes, such as put my back up instantly.

"Mine, Jack! mine? What has that got to do with it?"

"Well, which is your engagement ring?" I persisted. "The big turquoise?"

"Yes," she admitted unwillingly.

"Now, what could poor old Bob have been about when he went and chose such a ring as that?" I demanded. "You were such a ridiculous slip of a girl when you were first engaged to old Bob, weren't you? Have you forgotten?"

"You must have a turquoise large to be anything at all," she declared.

"Ah, I see ; then if Phyl's engagement ring was a turquoise, Edward Sinclair could have bought it as huge as he liked. Queer way you have of arguing, Nannie !"

"You are very disagreeable, Jack," she retorted.

"I am sure I'm awfully sorry if I am ; I have no intention of being. For my part, when I got engaged to Nell, I went out and got the biggest ring that I could scrape together the money for. Sinclair didn't do that, because if he had, he would have to hire a little boy to carry it around for her, instead of her carrying it herself on her hand ; but—"

"Oh, do be quiet, Jack," said Nannie quite crossly.

"I cannot think," remarked my wife to me later on, "what is coming to Nannie. It is all that fortune of that horrid old Miss Browne ; and we were so pleased, and she was so pleased when she got it ; but it has quite spoilt Nannie."

"Oh, my dear, she will get used to it after a while," I said soothingly. "It is only when the child looks so distressed, when she pitches into her for being young, that makes me say anything at all."

"So silly," Nell went on, "as if anybody wanted

to be old—as though there was any special merit or virtue in being old. Such nonsense! When Baby gets married, Jack, we won't marry her in that way."

"No, we won't. We will try and steer a level course, my dear, and not make ourselves ridiculous by toppling over, either on one side or the other, of the wall of commonsense."

"It is such a pity," Nell went on vexedly, "to put a cloud on the dear child's happiness. I cannot imagine what Nannie can be thinking of."

"It seems to me," I said, looking down at Nell, "that you are really the child's mother. I wonder if Nannie ever thinks of that!"

"No, she only thinks I spoil her, and make myself ridiculous over her."

"Then she is a very self-opinionated and conceited little person," was my uncompromising rejoinder. "However, it is no use upsetting ourselves. Phyl has got her own way, and Edward Sinclair will certainly press for a short engagement, and then it will all be forgotten like a cloud on a summer's day. Meantime, do you know that they have opened the baccarat rooms for ladies?"

"Oh, Jack, you don't really say so?" she cried.

"I do."

"Then you must take me in at once. I have seen a diamond ring down in the High Street that I am most anxious to have; I never wanted anything so badly in my life."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I would rather win it. Then I can wear it with a clean conscience."

I did take her into baccarat, into those stately halls of quiet dignity, where people play with broad five franc pieces, or still more alluring gold, or, if not actually with money, with bits of ivory which represent it. It is wonderful what a contrast the baccarat rooms present to the *salle des petits chevaux*. The crowd round the little horses are often so ill-mannered, jostling, bustling, snatching and elbowing their way—not to win, but to lose their money. The frequenters of the baccarat rooms are calm and quiet, yet friendly and cheerful withal. It is a game at which it is almost impossible to cheat; in truth, it is an honest game, for a game of chance, and we won about fifteen louis between us that afternoon, and Nell insisted upon going back again in the evening, whereby she added a couple of louis

to her store and I lost three from mine. And so, bit by bit, she played up the price of the ring, and then went gaily off and bought it.

"Just as easily as though I picked it up in the street," was her remark, as she joined me later in the Casino. "Isn't it a beauty, Jack?"

"Well, I don't know," I remarked doubtfully.

Nannie Dare, who had been on this expedition with Nell, looked at me with an expression of the deepest reproach on her charming face.

"Well, you are bad to please!" she exclaimed. "Whatever fault can you find with it?"

"I think it is too old for Nell."

"Too old?"

"Yes, I think it too old. She ought to have chosen something more simple, more suited to her age and position. It might suit her grandmother, or it might suit her when Baby is married and has made her a grandmother; but, for a child like Nell, I am sure it is very much too elaborate."

"Really, Jack, you are silly," was her disgusted comment.

Nell, who had dropped down to my meaning as the first words of objection passed my lips, sat down opposite me on a chair, and continued

seraphically admiring the beauties of her new ring. Nannie Dare changed the conversation somewhat hurriedly.

Fortunately for the happiness of the newly affianced couple, there was the yacht always at hand, a blessed excuse for getting safely out of any possible harsh comment. No mother in the world could object to an engaged young girl going off on a trip with her father, her uncle, her younger brother and sister, not even when her fiancé happened to be on board. And we did make use of that yacht duly and truly. But even the yacht did not make the way altogether smooth, for Nannie Dare, although she capitulated in the main, didn't wipe the slate quite clean.

"I should like Phyl to wait till she is twenty," was the last rag of maternal authority that she flaunted in Edward Sinclair's face.

"To wait three years, Mrs. Dare. It's simply preposterous!"

"If Phyl is not worth waiting three years for, Phyl is not worth anything."

"It's such a waste of time," he answered.

"Bob is quite of the same opinion about it as I."

"Then Bob is an ass," he blurted out.

"Edward!"

"I really beg your pardon, Mrs. Dare. I humbly beg your pardon; it slipped out quite un-
awares."

"You must have thought it," she said severely.

"I cannot do more than apologise," he returned.

"Really, the unusualness of your suggestion staggered me. I should like to talk to Major Dare about it myself."

"That is not at all necessary," said Nannie.

However, Edward Sinclair did contrive to get hold of Major Dare by himself—at least, when no one more important than I was by.

"Look here, Major," he began, "your wife told me this morning that you and she are both determined that Phyl shall wait till Phyl is twenty before we are married. Is that true?"

"If my wife said so, I suppose it is," replied Major Dare, looking extremely uncomfortable.

"Well, now, look here, Major, I am not going to wait till Phyl is twenty. I am willing to wait a decent three months, and that is the outside of what—barring unforeseen accidents—I am willing to wait. Now, is that clear?"

"Yes, that seems clear enough," returned Bob helplessly, "but of course if my wife says—"

"My dear chap," I put in, "it is not a question for your wife, it is a question for you; your consent is all that is necessary to transform Phyl into Mrs. Sinclair to-morrow. We all know that you wend your way through life like a great slave at the wheel of your wife's chariot, and as long as only your own happiness and comfort are concerned, it is no business of anybody but yourself; but when it comes to involving the ruin of your child's happiness, it is time for the slave at the chariot wheel to throw off the yoke of servitude."

"Jack," said he.

"Yes, I mean it. Now, take my advice; give your consent now, straight away, to Phyl's being married in three months from this date, and get the thing settled out of hand."

"Do you think I had better do that?"

"I do; I haven't been brother-in-law to your wife all these years without knowing her fairly well. Do it, Bob, and Nannie will like you all the better for it."

And much to my surprise Bob did it.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VERY MASTERFUL LOVER.

I OFFERED to go back with Bob Dare in order that he might the easier break the news to his wife; but, somewhat to my surprise, he declined my friendly offices.

"It is not necessary, old fellow," he said; "I would as soon go back by myself, to tell you the truth. I daresay she won't like it just at first, and I shall have to talk her round, but still Nannie is a devoted little mother, and she naturally wishes to do the best for her child's happiness. I don't think, you know, Jack, that you quite give her credit for that much."

"Of course I do," I replied, "but at the same time, all this shilly-shallying is excessively bad both for Phyl and for Sinclair. It is a very good marriage for the child, a brilliant marriage, and it is not fair on a man to be treated as if he was a

sort of burglar coming to steal something as soon as your back is turned."

"Perhaps you are right," said Bob, in a slow, heavy way. "At all events, I have given Sinclair my promise, and whatever Nannie says, I shall have to abide by it."

So he went off home alone. I stood at the Casino gates watching his long soldierly figure wend leisurely across the road.

"That chap was made to be bullied," my thoughts ran. "I was made to be bullied too, but I must say I prefer Nell's way of doing it. However, I need not trouble my head about them; that will all dry straight, not a doubt about it."

When I got home I found Nell in a state of suppressed fury.

"Really, Jack," she exclaimed, "I haven't got any patience with Nannie! I really haven't!"

"Oh, what is the matter?" I inquired.

"Well, I don't know what Nannie is thinking of, or what she is coming to. It's cruel, Jack! The poor—poor child!"

"Well, what is Nannie saying now?" I asked.

"She says she will not give her consent to Phyl's being married till she is one-and-twenty."

"Oh, she's put a year on," I said.

"Really, Jack, you *are* cold-blooded," Nell flashed out.

I laughed aloud, remembering the frame of mind I had sent old Bob home to his lunch in.

"Jack," said Nell.

"Don't worry yourself, my dear. Edward Sinclair and I tackled old Bob this morning properly, and Bob has given his consent that Phyl shall be married three months from this date; so I daresay they will have a bit of a row, but still Bob has gone home strong in the intention of sticking to his word."

My wife drew a long breath.

"Oh, I am so glad; I wonder if any of them will come up and let us know how things went off!"

"It is astonishing," I said, "how terrified you all are of that little soft-eyed woman. Don't worry, my dear child, we shall hear sooner or later."

It was little more than an hour after that Phyl came in like a whirlwind.

"Oh, dear Auntie, it's all settled," she said. "I don't know what magic Edward used this morn-

ing, but Father has given his consent, and dear little Mother—she has had to knuckle under and give hers. I really feel quite sorry for her,” she added, turning her radiant eyes on me, “because she was so determined I should be sent to school, or some other dreadful things, and that Edward should live for several years after the manner of Jacob waiting for Rachel. However, it’s all right now, so we need not bother ourselves about it any more.”

And after that we really did have peace, and by that time the gay time at Dieppe was practically over. August had gone out and September set in, and gradually one family after another cleared off; the yachts cleared out of the *bassin*, only the *Skylark* was left in undisputed possession of the calm expanse of water. We had intended to remain until at least the end of October, but Edward Sinclair was very anxious that Phyl should go over to England and pay visits to two of his married sisters, both of whom were extremely anxious to make her acquaintance; and his wish culminated in Bob Dare and Phyl going off with him in the yacht, Bob promising to escort her to Lady Debenham’s house, where, after staying a

night, he would be able to leave her. Then it was necessary that Nannie should go over and give the orders for her *trousseau*, and she insisted that Nell should accompany her.

"There is no reason why we should uproot all the two households," she exclaimed. "You can stay and look after Nanna and Baby, and Bob can stay and look after the twins. Bob hates London, especially at this time of the year, and Nell and I can do all that is necessary before Phyl joins us, and after that we can go back together."

Nell, however, objected to this arrangement. She has a curious fancy that I could never go away without her, and that she could never go away without me.

"If Bob hates London," she said, in decided tones, "Jack certainly does not, and he will be able to occupy himself quite well while you and I go round and do the shopping—that is, if you cannot do without me."

"I would rather not go without you," said Nannie. "In the first place, I am not used to being in London all alone, and Phyl will not be able to join us for a few days after we have come across; and then I shall be having people up to see me—

men from Aldershot—and I would rather you were with me ; I somewhat—”

I opened my eyes at this, for prudery was the last weapon that I should have expected to find a place in Mrs. Dare's panoply of war.

“What are you laughing at, Jack ?” she demanded suddenly.

“I was thinking it so very funny that you should need a chaperon,” I replied.

“Oh, I don't know—really, at my time of day. Jack, how absurd ! Oh, it's not that at all, only—if you must have it,” she said, “it is that young fellow, Charlie Danby ; he—I—I—you know, I must break it to him about Phyl's engagement, because you see he bespoke my good offices. I cannot leave him in ignorance.”

“Why didn't you write to him ?”

She looked a little wistful.

“It seems such a cold-blooded way of doing anything of that kind ; and besides that, you don't realise how very much in love with her the poor boy is. I wish now that I had not stopped him from speaking out. She would have been ‘my lady.’”

“Never !” I said, with emphasis.

"I am not so sure about that," persisted Nannie.

"I am, dear," cried Nell. "Phyl would never have looked at him."

"You have never seen him," said Mrs. Dare indignantly.

"I know I haven't, but I asked Phyl about him."

"How asked her?"

"Well, I asked if he was there, and told her that I knew people who knew him. I mentioned him quite casually, don't you see, and Phyl was most contemptuous; she said he was always hanging about your drawing-room, and she could not imagine how you stood it."

Nannie's face positively burned.

"Did Phyl say that?"

"Yes, dear," said Nell, smiling, "that's exactly what Phyl did say; so you may let the young man down quite easily, and not feel too compunctious one way or the other."

However, Nannie insisted that we should go to London with her, and as it was perfectly safe to leave Nanna in charge of the little house in the Faubourg, Nell and I went across with her.

I happened to be in the hotel at which we stayed

when young Sir Charles Danby came to call, and to be present when my sister-in-law broke the news that Phyl was engaged and shortly to be married. I won't pretend that it was not an unmistakable facer to the young soldier, but he took it as a soldier and a gentleman should take even the worst facer that can befall him. Mrs. Dare was quite inclined to be hysterical when he had taken his leave.

"I should have liked it, Nell—I should have liked it so much!"

"Nonsense, he won't compare with Edward Sinclair," said Nell. "You would only have liked it because the child would have been 'my lady,' and what is the good of being 'my lady' if you are not happy with it? Besides that, what is done cannot be undone, and you must make the best of it. I am sure you have been loyal enough to the poor boy, which anyone could see perfectly well from your manner; so now put on your hat and let us take a turn down Bond Street before it is time to dress for dinner."

After that I must confess that Mrs. Dare was easier in her mind, and therefore happier, and from that time she submitted to the inevitable

with a better grace than I should have conceived possible under the circumstances.

A few days later Edward Sinclair brought his young *fiancée* from his sister's house to join us, and then our party resolved itself into a pair and a trio—Edward Sinclair and I the somewhat unwilling pair, and Phyl and her mother and aunt the trio, who spent a great deal of time and a great deal of money in journeying round the different shrines of fashion.

I think that Mrs. Dare had expected Edward Sinclair to do a good deal of upholstering shopping on his bride's behalf.

"You are going to have the boudoir and Phyl's own rooms redecorated, of course, Edward?" she said to him one day.

"Yes, I am, Mrs. Dare, but it will do quite well after we are married. We shall not be at Peterham for at least three months, perhaps not until the spring."

"But still Phyl will want her rooms when she does go to Peterham."

"But she can use another suite while her own are being done up. I would rather she was not worried with it just now, and I would rather let

her eye get back to its normal state after all these terrible visits to dressmakers and people. She cannot very well do without clothes; furniture will keep comfortably until she is ready to choose it."

He was very masterful, that young man. As a matter of fact, I happened to know why. Phyl had specially asked him not to worry her with such matters at present, and he very judiciously took the whole blame of not doing up her own particular suite of rooms on his own shoulders.

"I foresee," I remarked to Nell, when Edward Sinclair had finally disposed of the subject to his future mother-in-law, "that Phyl's husband will very effectually see that his wife takes her own place from the very first, in spite of her extreme youth."

'And every day will mend that, dear boy," said Nell sapiently.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARRIAGE AND GIVING IN MARRIAGE.

IN due course of time the great event came off, and Phyllis Dare was transformed into Mrs. Edward Sinclair. I can scarcely tell you what magic Sinclair used, but he made himself such a nuisance to Phyl's parents that they gladly consented to the wedding taking place sooner than the prescribed three months. It was a very smart wedding, and all Sinclair's people came out handsomely on the occasion; indeed, by the time the ceremony had been performed, Phyl had such a collection of jewels that she might have been forgiven if she had lost her head and given herself a few airs; not that the dear child did so, she remained till the very last day of her maidenhood the same charming, *insouciant*, sweet-tempered, sunny-hearted young thing that she had been from her babyhood.

"What a dear little bride!" was the general verdict. "So utterly unspoiled," said the Sinclair contingent.

"Phyl is unspoiled," remarked Nell, "because she is altogether unspoilable. 'We have all tried our best to spoil her, but it is not to be done.'"

Then when the excitement was all at an end, and the happy couple had departed to Southampton for the yacht, which was to carry them to summer climes, we went back to Dieppe for a week, that we might settle our affairs there and have a few days of absolute quiet before we plunged into the vortex of life again. The convent scheme never came off, because when Jackie Dare went back to the school which was preparatory for Eton, his mother had not the heart to leave his twin sister in a foreign country alone.

"If we decide to go to Cairo," she said plaintively to me, "we cannot very well take such a child as that with us. I don't know what to do, and Bob won't hear of her being left in Dieppe."

I knew what she meant. Nell looked at me and I laughed.

"What does she do in the way of schooling at home?" I asked.

"Well, we have had Miss Wynne," Nannie replied.

"Then the best thing you can do is to tell Miss Wynne to come to town and put up with us."

"Oh, my dear Jack, it is putting too much on you!"

"Not for the first time," Nell remarked. "We have had the care of your children before, you know, and you had better let the child come home again. You won't mind her putting in the winter with us—eh?"

"Oh, Jack," she cried, "mind! What a way of putting it!"

So it was settled, and we all went away from Dieppe together. For my own part I was loth to leave the little place, and Nell declared she had never been so happy anywhere in her life. Nannie Dare enthusiastically spoke of it as Paradise, and great, long, silent Bob gave a comfortable sort of grunt, as if he coincided in that opinion. And yet we were all very glad to get away. I was unfeignedly rejoiced when I found myself once more settled in dear smoky London for the winter. I like London in the winter far better than in the height and bustle of what is usually called the Season. There may be a fog now and then—yes—and the days *are* short and the nights long. It may be cold and cheerless and damp and dreary, but it is London all the

while. Go where you will, London is London, and incomparably the place of places for those who love it.

During the excitement of Phyl's wedding we had not seen anything of our old friend, Mrs. Poplin-Browne. Towards Christmas, however, we went down to the country to spend a few days with Lord and Lady d'Ecie on the understanding that Mrs. Poplin-Browne and her two girls would be the only two visitors besides ourselves.

"I know you won't mind," Lady d'Ecie wrote to my wife, "coming on such a quiet visit. She has got over it wonderfully ; but at the same time she does not want to meet anybody at present excepting yourselves ; so if you can come we shall take it as a great personal favour to join us at this time."

She had got over it. I realised that as soon as I went into the great hall where Lady d'Ecie and her visitor were awaiting us ; and yet when I spoke of the husband that was gone, the tears fluttered up into her eyes, telling me that her love for him had been thoroughly genuine ; and yet—taking her condition on the whole—I must confess that it was unmistakable, even to the ordinary

observer, that she had got over the worst of her sorrow.

We had been at the Towers several days when Nell came into my dressing-room, where I was writing a letter.

"Very busy, Jack?" she asked.

"No, not particularly; I have just finished. Do you want anything?"

"No, I only asked the question." Then she sat down in a low chair by the fire, and waited until I had fastened up the last envelope. "Does it strike you as very funny, Jack," she said presently, "that nobody has once mentioned Billy Sherringham since we came down here?"

Now I had said nothing to Nell of Billy Sherringham's words to me on the day when we received the news of poor Mr. Poplin-Browne's death. I did not, as a rule, keep things from Nell; but in that instance I felt somehow as if he had been surprised into a confidence, and that I had no right to betray it.

"Now you speak of it," I replied, "I don't think anybody has mentioned him."

"I am sure they have not in my presence," Nell declared. "What does it mean, Jack? Has he sheered off, or what?"

"I don't think Billy is the man to sheer off, if you ask me," I replied.

"Oh, don't you? What makes you say that?"

"Well, I have known Billy a good many years. He is a gentleman, a man of honour, a very haw-haw man about town, and all that sort of thing; but Billy will do the right thing on every occasion and at all times."

"You think he—?"

"My dear child, I don't think twice about that. You know she may not take him."

"Well, she might not," said Nell, "that is true; I hadn't thought of that; but still, I think it would be a temptation; don't you, Jack?"

"I daresay it would; Bill is a very good sort; it would be an excellent marriage for her, only it's early days even to be speculating about it. I think you had better wait, old lady, and see what you will see."

"I believe," said Nell curiously, "that you do know something."

"I am sure," I replied, "that I don't."

"Well, that's true, but I want to know all the same."

"My dear girl, the best thing you can do is to wait patiently for the development of events. I

have done it on more occasions than one when I've been devoured with curiosity to know what was going to happen in the immediate future."

"Were you ever devoured with curiosity?" Nell asked.

I laughed outright.

"Many and many a time, but somehow I am not at all devoured in this instance."

"You think—"

"No, I think nothing, excepting that it would be distinctly bad form if we saw the slightest sign of Billy Sherringham just at present. Audrey d'Ecie could not have invited him at the same time as Mrs. Poplin-Browne, great friends as he is with d'Ecie."

"All the same, I did ask Audrey whether she knew anything, and she is just as much in the dark as I am; she says, indeed," said Nell, "that she does not believe Mrs. Poplin-Browne has ever seen him since we were all in Dieppe together; if she has, neither she nor he has uttered a word about it."

"Old Billy was always discretion itself," I remarked.

Nell looked at me sharply.

"I believe you know something."

"My dear child, I assure you, not a word."

"Honest Injun, Jack?"

"Yes, honest Injun. Nothing but what I gathered at the time of poor old Poplin-Browne's death, and that was nothing to go by, because we were all excited and upset at the news. She is getting over it very well, considering what a shock it must have been to her, and that she was really fond of him; but don't try to dive into the future, old lady; let time do its own work."

"I am not trying to dive into the future exactly, Jack," said Nell; "I only wanted to know, that was all; and Audrey d'Ecie wants to know worse than I do."

"Well, dear, she knows Mrs. Poplin-Browne quite well enough to ask her plump and plain."

"Yes, she does, but she doesn't like to."

"Well, then, she must be like the Devonshire squire, she must remain in her own ignorance."

So we went back to our flat as ignorant as we had left it. Mrs. Poplin-Browne made a most decorous widow, wearing caps, weepers, and broad black borders to her handkerchiefs, and religiously abstaining from going into any sort or kind of

society. Then, when three more months had gone by, during which time we had seen her on some half-dozen occasions, Billy Sherringham surprised us by walking in one morning just before lunch time.

"The fact is," he said, "I came to ask you to give me some lunch, Mrs. Winter."

"My dear Sir William, I am delighted," my wife replied.

I remember that day, when we had a fish *soufflé* with oyster sauce, to which Billy Sherringham did ample justice, as he did to the slice of cold beef which followed. It was not, however, till the estimable Potter had left us, and he had lighted his cigarette, that he divulged the reason of his visit.

"Why, that is—" he began, and Nell fixed her eyes upon him.

"Yes," she said quietly.

After his way, Billy Sherringham put on a look of innocence and utter stupidity, shot out one cuff, and fixed his eyes on a far corner of the room.

"The fact is, Mrs. Winter, I did not drop in to-day without a reason."

"No?" said Nell inquiringly. "I hope it is a pleasant reason?"

"Well, yes, at least that's as may be. The fact is, Mrs. Winter, I am going to be married."

"Oh!" Nell sat bolt upright. "Oh, really! Then I suppose we must congratulate you, Sir William?"

"Awfully good of you," he replied stolidly.

"And do I—that is, do we know the lady?"

He turned and looked at me with an astonished expression, which said as plainly as possible, "Then you did keep my counsel?"

"There is only one woman in the world that I should be at all likely to marry, Mrs. Winter," he said a little stiffly.

"And that is—?" said Nell, in the tone of one who had absolutely no clue to the truth.

"That, of course, is Mrs. Poplin-Browne."

In her excitement Nell jumped up from her seat at the table.

"Oh, Sir William, I am so glad! I am so glad! You don't know!" she cried. She held out both her hands with a heartiness of which there could be no mistaking. "She is a good woman, she is a charming woman," she cried. "I have the greatest admiration and respect for her."

"She is the kindest woman in the world," said Sir William.

"I don't know that I was ever more pleased in my life than when dear Audrey Nugent married Geoffrey d'Ecie, and I am sure you will make her a delightful husband."

"I will do my best," he said.

"She is such a good woman and so charming—such a kind woman too!"

"She is the only woman, Mrs. Winter!" said Billy Sherringham.

"Then," said Nell, "it will be all right."

They shook hands again, and then he shook hands with me; and then we had a bottle of champagne up, and drank to the health, happiness, and prosperity of the future bride and groom.

"Now, tell me," said Nell, "is it a secret? May it be spoken of? Tell me everything, Sir William!"

"It is not actually a secret," he replied. "I only brought it off last night. I didn't care to broach the subject before, but for the present, Mrs. Winter, the less it is talked of the better pleased she will be. She is dreadfully sensitive on the point, and although she has promised that she will not keep me waiting longer than a year, at the same time she does not want it announced or anything of

that kind till three weeks or a month before the time."

"But I may go and see her?" cried Nell. Nell was quite excited about the new turn of events.

"Oh, yes," Billy cried, "she is so fond of you; she will be delighted. I—I—well, the fact is, I wired to Audrey d'Ecie the first thing this morning, and I should think she has gone down there already."

"Oh, she is sure to have done, and I shall trot up to Rose Diamond Road the moment I have swallowed my coffee. Oh, Sir William, I am so glad about it!" cried my wife impulsively, flinging her hand across the table towards him.

I watched the little scene in open-mouthed amazement and admiration, to see Billy Sherringham, of all men of my acquaintance, the stiff starch codfish of conventional and aristocratic society, moved—unmistakably moved—by the deepest and truest emotions to which the human heart can rise and fall. It was a sight for the gods.

"Mrs. Winter," he said at last, "you have always been my friend, and I have known you years and years and years, and you have always been hers,

and I am the luckiest fellow in England to-day. I—I—I!”

Nell looked at him, then she looked at me. At last she said :

“Sir William, you cannot find words with which to express yourself?”

“No,” he said, “I don’t know that I can.”

“Well, now,” she cried, “I am going to say the most vulgar thing that ever passed the lips of either man or woman. I can give you the very phrase.”

“Give it to me,” he said.

“Blow me tight!” she cried.

“Oh, Mrs. Winter,” said Billy Sherringham, sorrowfully, solemnly. “Blow me tight if I ain’t!”

FINIS.

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